

Frequently Asked Questions

Penobscot River Closure

June 21, 2016

Background

- In 2014 the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) closed an area at the mouth of the Penobscot River after analysis of data in a report from a federal court-ordered study, the Penobscot River Mercury Study (PRMS).
- DMR, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MEDEP), and MECDC designed a sampling plan to confirm the PRMS lobster mercury data and to further examine mercury levels in crab (Rock crab) in the closed area and adjacent areas.
- Sampling took place during 2014 and 2015.
- The new closure is being implemented through rulemaking that takes effect Tuesday, June 21
- The area of the new closure is approximately 5.5 square miles
- The area within the previous closure where lobsters were harvested was approximately 7 square miles.
- The total area where Maine lobsters are harvested is approximately 14,000 square miles.

Why is the New Closure Being Implemented?

- The additional closure is being implemented as a result of analysis of data from the 2014 sampling work. 2015 data has yet to be analyzed.
- The 2014 and 2015 sampling included areas along the eastern shore of Cape Jellison, which had not been sampled in the Penobscot River Mercury Study (PRMS).
- The Cape Jellison area was included in the 2014 and 2015 sampling work to confirm the southern boundary of the original closure.
- Results of the 2014 sampling work indicate that levels in tail meat for samples collected on the southeastern shore of Cape Jellison contained 292.7 nanograms (a billionth of a gram) of methylated mercury per gram of tissue.
- According to the FDA, canned white tuna contains 350 ng/g of mercury.

When will the 2015 data be available?

- There is no timetable established yet for the analysis of the 2015 data.

For information and guidance on healthy fish consumption:

- The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention – 866-292-3474

For information on remediation efforts on the Penobscot River contact:

- The Maine Department of Environmental Protection – 207-287-5842

For more information on the lobster and crab harvest closure contact:

- The Maine Department of Marine Resources Communications Director – 624-6569