

BOG Meeting

3-18-13

Draft Statewide Exposure Reduction Strategy**Background**

Pollutants that bioaccumulate in the food web are harming the beneficial uses of water bodies in California. Mercury is a particularly widespread problem throughout California. Recent SWAMP studies have shown that commonly-consumed sport fish species are elevated for mercury in water bodies throughout the state, and other contaminants are found in fish from some areas. Consumption of these fish results in exposure to contaminants and poses possible health risks to anglers and their families. While clean-up of these chemicals is the long term goal, activities to inform fish consumers about elevated levels of bioaccumulative chemicals in fish is the most practical way to reduce exposure in the near term. Fish consumers are a critical end user of monitoring data. Monitoring data directly support advisories which provide guidance to fish consumers on the species and quantities that can be safely eaten.

In the last few years, there have been several successful activities and programs to inform and improve the management of bioaccumulative pollutants in California waterbodies. These include:

- Statewide monitoring surveys of contaminants in sport fish across all of the major water body types,
- New or updated safe eating guidelines for many water bodies,
- The “Safe to Eat” Portal that provides public access to information on bioaccumulation,
- A centralized database (CEDEN) for storing and sharing bioaccumulation monitoring data,
- A successful two-year project in San Francisco Bay that involved collaborations with community-based groups and local agencies to reduce exposure to contaminants among diverse populations

Despite these successes, California lacks a comprehensive program to inform and engage sport fish consumers about contaminants and encourage them to take steps to reduce their exposure. CDPH’s project in San Francisco Bay and similar past efforts in the Delta were funded by dischargers and grants, but long-term funding for these programs has not been identified.

Possible Roles for BOG on Exposure Reduction

With existing resources and better coordination and collaboration the BOG could:

1. Develop a statewide exposure reduction strategy, including priorities and collaborators and their roles

2. Present strategy to WQMC for endorsement and direction to appropriate collaborators for in-kind contributions to communication efforts (see #4 below)
3. Review Safe to Eat portal and develop suggestions to broaden scope of information and diversify the audiences that utilize it
4. Identify opportunities for improving dissemination of fish contamination information through ongoing programs such as dock walkers, boater safety, interpretive/visitor centers, CDFW programs, county health departments, etc.
5. Identify and prioritize longer-term funding to support sustained strategy implementation
6. Consider inclusion of fish species and locations identified by local communities and tribes in monitoring activities

With additional resources the BOG could:

1. Explore ways to provide broader access to information related to fish monitoring, advisories, and exposure reduction. This may include conducting usability testing on the portal to identify ways to improve access to and utility of information
2. Develop signs and other types of educational materials to provide advisory information to the public
3. Implement exposure reduction activities for high-priority locations through advisory groups, community-based projects, and training

Other ongoing activities the BOG could participate in with partners:

1. R5: Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program (MERP)
2. OEHHA: advisory development and collaboration with CDPH on ongoing activities
3. CDPH:
 - a. Community needs assessment for Delta MERP
 - b. Advisory message evaluation
 - c. SFB signage extension and evaluation
 - d. Educational materials development (e.g., advisory brochures) and translation
 - e. Training on fish contamination

Follow up actions from this meeting could include:

1. Revise draft strategy, incorporating feedback from BOG meeting discussion
2. Present strategy to the Water Quality Monitoring Council