



State of Utah

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High Mercury Levels Found in Two Duck Species

Hunters Should Not Eat Shovelers and Goldeneyes

High mercury levels have been found in two species of ducks on the southern end of the Great Salt Lake, the Division of Wildlife Resources announced today.

Northern shovelers and common goldeneyes are the two duck species with the high levels.

On Sept. 29, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) issued a waterfowl consumption advisory recommending people not eat either species of duck. Officials from UDOH, the Utah Department of Environmental Quality and the DWR worked in partnership to issue the advisory.

The results of testing that's been done so far is available in a Health Consultation document at the Department of Health's Web site (www.health.utah.gov/enviroepi).

Eating meat from these two species could result in an intake of mercury that exceeds the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's health recommendations, according to the UDOH analysis. There is no health risk to other recreationists on the lake.

Several other duck species also have been sampled. "Green-winged teal and gadwalls were well below the screening level for mercury and hunters should feel safe eating them," said Jim Karpowitz, director of the DWR. "Mallards were just below the EPA's mercury screening level of 0.3 parts per million. We'll be doing more sampling and testing to further evaluate mallards and other duck species on the lake."

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Duck Hunting Season Opens Oct. 1

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Utah's duck hunting season opens this Saturday, Oct. 1, and Karpowitz recommends that duck hunters avoid shooting shovelers and goldeneyes. "If you kill any of these birds, you must retrieve them and include them as part of your bag limit," he said.

Tom Aldrich, migratory game bird coordinator for the DWR, says 487,000 ducks are currently on Utah's waterfowl management areas and the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. Of those 487,000 ducks, less than 10 percent (47,000) are shovelers. No goldeneyes were found.

"It's very unlikely that hunters will bag a goldeneye in the next few weeks," Aldrich said. "Goldeneyes represent only 2 percent of the ducks harvested in Utah, and they usually don't arrive at the Great Salt Lake until mid-November."

Hunters could bag plenty of shovelers, however. During the past three years, 13 to 14 percent of the ducks taken by Utah hunters from mid-October to mid-December have been shovelers.

DWR Will Expand Mercury Study

A study to determine the level of mercury in ducks began this July when a small number of meat samples from several waterfowl species collected on the southern end of the lake last winter were tested.

Mercury was found in several of the samples, so the DWR decided to collect a larger number of waterfowl in August. Lab results from those samples also were assessed by the Utah Department of Health, which led to the Sept. 29 waterfowl consumption advisory.

"The Division of Wildlife Resources, along with the UDOH and the lab at Utah State University, have worked hard to get these birds collected and sampled before the start of the duck hunting season," Karpowitz said. "Now we'll work hard, throughout the fall and winter, to collect more birds and learn more about the mercury situation on the lake."

"A lot of work still needs to be done," said Clay Perschon, Great Salt Lake Ecosystem project leader for the DWR. "Only a small number of birds have been sampled so far, and all of those birds have come from the southern end of the lake. We don't know much about mercury levels in waterfowl using other areas of the lake."

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"The next steps are to expand the survey by collecting a larger number of birds and collecting them from several areas on the lake."

Mercury Working Group

The officials who issued the advisory have established a Mercury Work Group to coordinate and collaborate on mercury studies and

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investigations that are ongoing in Utah. Stakeholders from a broad base of state, federal and nonprofit agencies, industry and the public are members of the group. Information about this work group is available at www.deq.utah.gov/issues/Mercury/work_group.htm

Information about the waterfowl consumption advisory will also be distributed locally, and will be available at www.health.utah.gov/enviroepi and each of the agencies' Web sites.

More information about the health effects of mercury can be found at www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html

General information about mercury in Utah is available at www.deq.utah.gov/issues/Mercury/index.htm

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