

Knowing When to Eat Your Catch

According to NYSG's recent study, sportfishing reels \$3.6 billion into the economy of New York State. However, in some locations, anglers who consume the fish they catch can be exposed to chemical contaminants. Several management strategies like closing fisheries, banning take of certain species or issuing fish consumption health advisories have been used to try to help reduce public health risk.

Issuing advisories presumes that anglers are aware of them, understand them, and know the consequences of their decisions to comply or not comply with them. But often information is lacking about the effectiveness of fish health advisories. To know whether an advisory is effective, information is needed about which groups of anglers know of the health advisories and what proportion understand them. But compliance is the real key.

To address this problem, New York Sea Grant researcher **Dr. Barbara A. Knuth** conducted a mail survey in January 1992 of New York licensed anglers. The survey was developed to be similar to a statewide angler survey conducted in 1988 so that comparisons could be made between the two surveys. Anglers were asked about their catch and consumption of fish, their fish preparation and cooking methods, awareness of the health advisory, changes they made due to the advisory, their sources of information about the advisory and other information they would like to have made available.

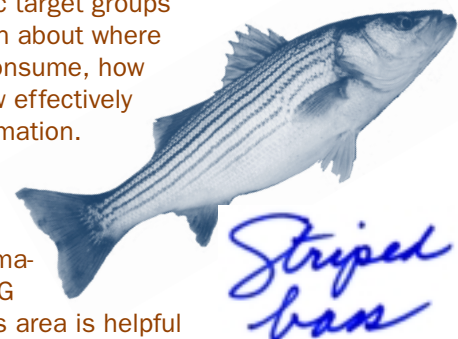
Knuth's study showed that awareness of the health advisory by licensed New York anglers was high (85%). This was an increase from the previous statewide survey (80%). However certain groups of anglers were less aware or unaware of the health advisories. These groups included people with low income, as well as women and minorities.

State health officials used this information to develop ways to target these groups with information about the health advisory. One important effort involved a cooperative project between the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and the New York State Depart-

ment of Health (NYSDOH) that was funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1999. The project hired and trained "health rangers" who worked in New York Harbor and the Hudson River to get the word out about the health advisories. The rangers posted public fishing sites, developed a brochure for anglers, spoke to community groups, and developed public service announcements (PSA) for local radio and television broadcast both in English and Spanish. As a result, the NYSDOH received many calls for information from the Spanish-speaking public. This project exemplifies how New York Sea Grant-funded research stimulates cooperation among different agencies (NYSDEC, NYSDOH, and EPA) to address an issue of public concern.

There is a continuing role for New York Sea Grant to play in this area of research. Information is needed about specific risks of consumption and specific target groups of people. Questions remain about where they fish, how much they consume, how best to reach them and how effectively they are targeted with information. This is especially true for the lower Hudson and New York City where licensing is not required and thus information is lacking. Further NYSG funding of research into this area is helpful for agencies such as NYSDOH to do their work.

Is sport fishing for walleye or striped bass one of your passions? Keep on top of the latest advisories about eating sport fish caught in New York waters from Lake Erie to Montauk. Just log onto our Seafood pages <www.seagrantsunysb.edu/seafoodtechnology> and scroll to "Sites of Interest." Click on "NYS Health Advisories."



— Articles by Lane Smith, Project Assistant

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