

Study finds widespread mercury contamination in fish

Aug. 21 -- A new government study finds widespread mercury contamination in fish across the country.

Scientists detected mercury contamination in every fish sampled in 291 streams across the country, according to a U.S. Geological Survey study released Aug. 19.

About a quarter of the fish contained mercury levels exceeding the EPA set standard for protecting people who consume average amounts of fish. More than two-thirds of the fish exceeded the U.S. EPA "level of concern" for fish-eating mammals.

"This study shows just how widespread mercury pollution has become in our air, watersheds, and many of our fish in freshwater streams," Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said.

Some of the highest levels of mercury in fish were found in the tea-colored or "blackwater" streams in North Carolina and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Louisiana.

High levels of mercury in fish also were found in relatively undeveloped watersheds in the Northeast and the Upper Midwest. Elevated levels were noted in areas of the West affected by mining.

The USGS report is available online at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2009/5109>.

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