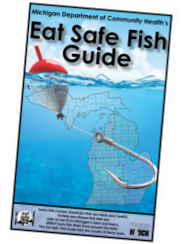


Frequently Asked Questions: Eating Fish from the Detroit River

Some fish in the Detroit River shouldn't be eaten because there are too many chemicals in them, but there are plenty of fish that are OK to eat. You just need to choose wisely.

The **Eat Safe Fish Guide** can help you choose safer fish to eat from lakes and rivers in Michigan. You can get a free copy of the **Eat Safe Fish Guide** from the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) by calling 1-800-648-6942 or visiting www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish.



It's not only Michigan fish that have chemicals in them. You can use the **Buy Safe Fish** brochure to learn how to choose safer fish from other states and countries. You can call MDCH or visit www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish to get a copy of the brochure.

How do chemicals end up in fish?

The chemicals that cause the guidelines for eating fish from the Detroit River are mercury, PCBs, and dioxins.

Mercury

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment, but most of the mercury in our air comes from the smokestacks of coal-fired power plants and other industries. Mercury particles in air can travel far from where they started. After landing on the ground, the mercury particles are carried by rain run-off into our rivers and wetlands.

PCBs

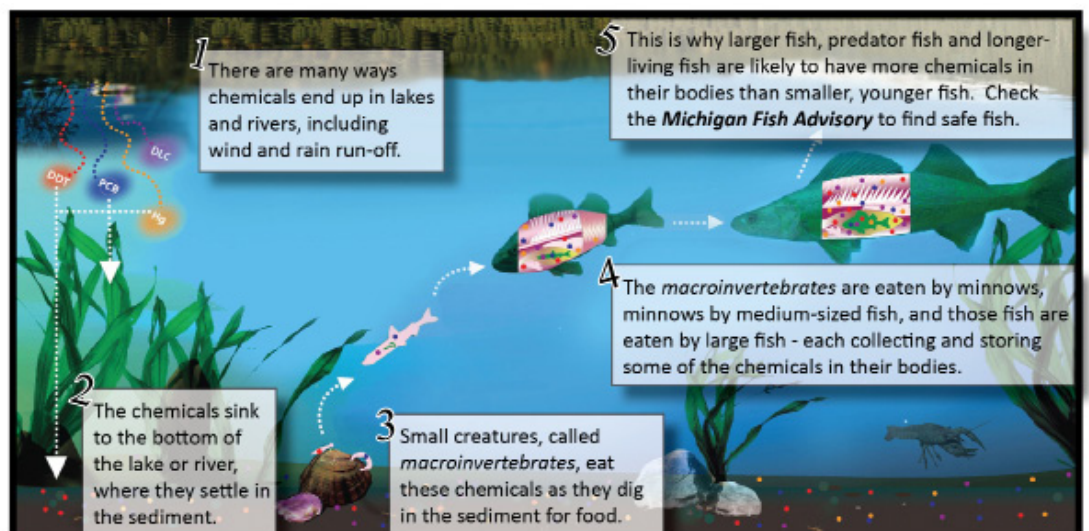
PCBs were used in many products including electrical equipment and hydraulic oils. While PCBs are no longer made in the U.S., some of these old PCB-containing products may still be used. PCBs can be spilled into the environment from these old products, from old or poorly contained waste sites, or from intentional dumping. Once in the environment, PCBs can be carried by rain run-off and storm drains into our lakes and rivers.

Dioxins

Dioxins are not made on purpose. They're created when chlorine chemicals are made or used, and when things containing chlorine - like paper and plastics - are burned. Dioxins from smokestacks can enter our water from the air like mercury does. Dioxins can also get into the environment from old or poorly contained waste sites or from intentional dumping. Like PCBs, dioxins can be carried by rain run-off and storm drains into our lakes and rivers.

A lot of these chemicals were put into our environment before we knew the long-term problems these chemicals caused. It was also before the U.S. Clean Water Act and other laws were put into place to protect the environment. Sometimes companies would dump chemical waste directly into the river to get rid of it. Other times, chemical spills would happen accidentally.

Once these chemicals are in the water, they sink to the bottom and become a part of the fish food chain. The US Clean Water Act and US Clean Air Act have cut back on a lot of this pollution. This is why the amount of PCBs and dioxins in our fish are slowly going down. Mercury is still a growing problem in some areas in the state, though. But mercury levels in fish seem to be staying about the same in the Detroit River.



What can these chemicals do to my health?

The chemicals in fish won't make you sick right away. Not everyone will get sick from eating fish with these chemicals in them. Some people will be fine after years of eating these fish. Others could have health problems. It is difficult to know who might get sick from the chemicals in fish and who won't. It's best to choose your fish wisely and limit the amount of chemicals you eat. This will reduce your chance of getting sick from these chemicals.

Chemical in fish	Possible health problems if too much is eaten
Mercury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brain development can be harmed in fetuses and children • heart function can be harmed in older adults • immune system can be harmed
Dioxins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • linked to development of cancer • linked to development of diabetes • fertility can be harmed • thyroid can be harmed
PCBs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brain development can be harmed in fetuses and children • linked to development of cancer • linked to development of diabetes • immune system can be harmed

What is being done to clean up the river?

The Detroit River is getting better thanks to federal and state environmental rules that now limit what can be put into our waters. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the Friends of the Detroit River, and the Detroit River Public Advisory Council are working hard to get rid of pollution that was put there before.

Removing the contaminated sediment from the river bottom is one way to get rid of some of the chemicals. In 2005, the EPA and MDEQ removed 470,000 pounds of contaminated sediment from the Black Lagoon in Trenton, Michigan - including almost 160 pounds of PCBs; 360 pounds of mercury; 300,000 pounds of oil and grease; 38,000 pounds of lead; and 140 pounds of zinc!

These groups are now planning to do a similar project in Riverview, Michigan.



View of the Black Lagoon oil plume near the McLouth Steel plant (Source: EPA)



Removing the polluted mud from the Black Lagoon, 2004. (Source: EPA)



Testing for pollution in the Trenton Channel, 2012 (Source: EPA)

Even with the clean-ups happening in the river, it will take many years for these chemicals to leave the ecosystem and the fish. Always be sure to check the **Eat Safe Fish Guide** before choosing fish to eat.

You can visit www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish or call 1-800-648-6942 to get a free copy of the **Eat Safe Fish Guide**.

If you would like to find out what you can do to help the Detroit River, contact the Friends of the Detroit River at (734) 288-3889 or visit their website at www.detroitriver.org.



If you eat a lot of fish or always go fishing in the same lake or river, check the **Eat Safe Fish Guide** to be sure you're eating safe fish!

Call 1-800-648-6942 or visit www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish to learn more.

Michigan Department of Community Health

