

Tainting of Fish Flavor in Michigan's Areas of Concern

Areas of Concern (AOCs)

In the 1980s, the United States and Canadian governments identified 43 places in the Great Lakes region that had severe, long-term environmental problems. These places are called *Areas of Concern*.

People in federal, state, and provincial government environmental remediation programs are working to address the problems in these areas. Funding and expert guidance are provided to AOCs to help local groups, known as Public Advisory Councils (PACs), work on these environmental problems, as well.

Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs)

These environmental problems are called *beneficial use impairments*. There are 14 categories of BUIs, originally named in the U.S.-Canadian Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. However, a place does not have to have all 14 problems to be called an AOC.

Each BUI has goals that need to be met in order to be removed from the AOC's list of problems. Once all BUIs are removed from the list, the AOC is considered to be no longer impaired and can be *delisted*, or removed from the list of AOCs.



Michigan's AOCs in 2012

The 14 BUIs that an AOC can have are:

- Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption
- Tainting of Fish and Wildlife Flavor
- Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations
- Fish Tumors or Other Deformities
- Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- Degradation of Benthos
- Degradation of Aesthetics
- Beach Closings
- Added Costs to Agriculture or Industry
- Restrictions on Dredging Activities
- Eutrophication or Undesirable Algae
- Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odor Problems
- Bird or Animal Deformities or Reproductive Problems
- Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton Populations

Over the years, several BUIs have been removed from Michigan's AOCs, as citizens, industries, and government joined together to improve our state's environmental health. In fact, after decades of hard work, some Michigan AOCs only have one or two BUIs remaining and are getting closer to being delisted.

Tainting of Fish Flavor BUI

If an AOC has a **Tainting of Fish Flavor BUI**, it means that the fish from the affected lake or river once had a flavor not normal for fish. Many different chemicals can cause these strange flavors, but they are often caused by oils in the water.

The Detroit River was the last AOC to still have this problem. As some of the problem areas in the Detroit River have been cleaned up, the fish flavor got better. In fact, the State has not received any reports of strange fish flavors in several years.

To be sure the fish tainting problem really is better, the Friends of the Detroit River surveyed nearly 300 people who ate Detroit River fish in 2011 and 2012. Of those who had eaten Detroit River fish, 91% said the taste of the fish from the river was now "good" to "excellent."

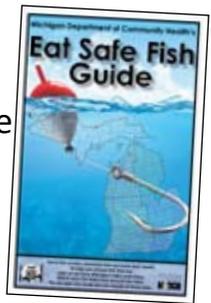
It is important to note that:

- **Strong "fishy" flavors are not considered to be part of the Tainting of Fish Flavor BUI.**
- **Fish with meat that is softer than normal is not considered to be part of the Tainting of Fish Flavor BUI.**
- **Sores or tumors on the fish are not part of the Tainting of Fish Flavor BUI.**
- **The Tainting of Fish Flavor BUI is not the same as the Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI.**

If you are concerned about a fish that you caught that seems sick or is deformed, or if you see a large number of dead fish, you can report it to your local Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) office. The number for the MDNR office nearest Detroit is (248) 359-9040.

You can't taste all chemicals. Use the **Eat Safe Fish Guide**.

- You can't always taste the chemicals in fish that can cause health problems in people. In fact, the chemicals that cause the Michigan Department of Community Health's (MDCH) fish eating guidelines and the **Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI** to be issued can't be tasted at all.
- The **MDCH Eat Safe Fish Guide** can help you choose safer fish to eat from many of Michigan's lakes and rivers, not just the ones in the AOCs. MDCH tests filets of fish for chemicals from locations all around the state.



Even when the **Tainting of Fish Flavor BUI** is removed from an AOC's list of problems, fish from the area will still be tested and listed in the **MDCH Eat Safe Fish Guide** for some time after. This is because different chemicals cause different problems. None of the chemicals listed in the **MDCH Eat Safe Fish Guide** will ever change the taste or the look of the fish.

Michigan lakes and rivers are improving thanks to federal and state environmental rules, and the hard work of the US Environmental Protection Agency, the MDEQ, and the PACs. However, it will take many years for these chemicals to leave the ecosystem and the fish.

To learn more about AOCs & BUIs:

MDEQ - Office of the Great Lakes
517-335-3168

<http://www.michigan.gov/deqaocprogram>



To learn more about eating safe fish:

MDCH - Division of Environmental Health
1-800-648-6942

<http://www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish>

