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HEALTH

# No Nuclear Risk to North Pacific Fish, Officials Say

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska - North Pacific fish are so unlikely to be contaminated by radioactive material from the crippled nuclear plant in Japan that there's no reason to test them, according to federal and state of Alaska health officials.

Dangerous levels of radiation have been reported off the coast from the Fukushima reactor complex. However, a spokeswoman for the federal Food and Drug Administration told the Anchorage Daily News that the ocean is so huge, and Alaska fisheries so far away, that there is no realistic threat.

Alaska's food safety program manager, Ron Klein of the Department of Environmental Conservation, said the FDA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have demonstrated that Alaskans have no cause for worry.

"Based on the work they're doing, no sampling or monitoring of our fish is necessary," he said.

A little more than a month into the nuclear crisis, Japanese officials believe they have plugged the major leak that allowed tons of water containing highly radioactive isotopes of iodine and cesium to flow into the sea.

The reactors and spent-fuel-rod pools remain unstable, according to Congressional testimony Tuesday by the chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. A Japanese official said recently the crisis will continue for "a long time."

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Alaska is the nearest U.S. state to Japan. Fish caught by U.S. fishermen in the 200-mile economic zone swim even closer. That has prompted some fears, particularly in Europe, that Alaska fish could be contaminated.

Tyson Fick, spokesman for the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, said he's urging fishermen and consumers to look at the science conducted by federal agencies. In Germany and Austria, he said, Alaska fish may have gotten caught up in anti-nuclear politics.

The Green Party in Germany, campaigning in regional elections, used the nuclear issue late last



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month to take over the state government in prosperous Baden-Wurttemberg, where conservatives had ruled for more than 50 years. Alaska pollock is sold as fish sticks throughout Germany, Fick said, and fear of them could be trouble.

In Anchorage, Dannon Southall of 10th and M Seafoods said customers have expressed concern, but not enough to stop buying fish. Almost all fish the store is selling now was caught and frozen before the March 11 earthquake, he said.

As new supplies replace the old, he expects imported fish especially to be tested if they come from waters close to Japan.

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As for the sea in the region near Fukushima, only octopus and eel from there had been imported to Alaska in the past, and that was mainly for sushi, he said. DeLancey, the FDA spokeswoman, said those Japanese fishermen were disrupted by the tsunami and are no longer fishing anyway.

The FDA has not been testing U.S. fish.

"We've been working with NOAA to keep an eye on U.S. waters, to see if there is any cause for alarm, and we do have the capability to begin testing if that does occur," she said.

NOAA fisheries spokeswoman Kate Naughton declined to answer questions and referred a reporter back to DeLancey and the EPA.

DeLancey said that so far, there's no reason for concern about Fukushima. The radioactive materials in the water near Fukushima quickly become diluted in the massive volume of the Pacific, she said. Fallout that lands on the surface tends to stay there, giving the most unstable ones isotopes, such as iodine, time to decay before reaching fish, she said.

Some imported fish are tested, she said, but those also appear safe.

Information from: *Anchorage Daily News*, <http://www.adn.com>

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