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June 18, 2010 Partial Transcript The Rachel Maddow Show

Read the transcript to the Friday show

Updated 6:39 a.m. PT, Mon., June 21, 2010

Guests: Gerald Wojtala, Debbie Stabenow

RACHEL MADDOW, HOST (voice-over): You know that metaphor when people say something doesn't pass the smell test?

Well, now, in the BP oil disaster era, it's no longer a metaphor. Smell tests for real—Trained smell testers monitoring America's seafood supply.

As technology continues to appear to go backwards, but politics goes forward, at least it does for Democrats—as conservatives commit themselves to a disastrous, renewed embrace of the oil industry…"

"…MADDOW: OK. Coming up next: smell-testing Gulf Coast seafood. Not metaphorical smell-testing but actual smell-testing. That's how we test it turns out. Humans smell and taste it. That story next…."

"…MADDOW: So, I was riding the train back from D.C. to New York today, and I did something I never do. I read the newspaper on paper. I do everything online. I haven't picked up an actual print newspaper in years.

But today, I was very much loving Amtrak and enjoying drinking my a.m. coffee and eating my a.m. bagel and reading my print copy of "The Washington Post" when I ruined everything by snorting my a.m. coffee right out of my nose, right onto the print copy of the paper—when I came across a Q&A in the paper with one of our former guests who I met in Louisiana, Dr. Edward Overton at LSU. "The Post" asks him and another expert, Professor Ian MacDonald from Florida State about various scientific things about the BP oil disaster.

Here's where I snorted the coffee, just the last question of the Q&A. **Question: "What efforts are being made to detect contamination in seafood from the Gulf?"**

Answer, Dr. Overton: "There's no fishing or harvesting in a large area that has been affected by the oil. Of course, fish can swim in and out of that zone, so the zone of no fishing is much larger than the actual oil area. Then, the catch is inspected rigorously by organoleptic testing, which is a fancy science word for taste and smell. A selected portion is undergoing chemical analysis."

Then Professor MacDonald says: "There are tasters trained to find seafood contamination. It turns out that the trained palate can detect hydrocarbons in the parts-per-million range."

That‘s how we‘re testing the seafood for contamination. Smell tests – 60 sniffers/tasters from various agencies and organizations have been trained so far in seafood sensory—seafood sensory testing by the International Food Protection Training Institute and NOAA‘s fishery service at the National Seafood Inspection Lab in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Apparently, there is chemical testing of the fish and seafood as well, but there‘s no machine better suited for this task of detecting minute amounts of oil in seafood and shell fish than the trained human palate. Please tell me more.

Joining us now is Gerry Wojtala. He is executive director for the International Food Protection Training Institute.

Mr. Wojtala, thank you very much for your time.

GERALD WOJTALA, INTL. FOOD PROJECT TRAINING INSTITUTE: Thank you, Rachel.

MADDOW: So, to be clear: you‘re not just finding people who have supernatural smelling and tasting abilities and putting them on the case. You‘re training regular folks to be able to detect contamination, is that right?

WOJTALA: That‘s absolutely correct. It really—it‘s the training, you can almost take anyone and put them through this training and it really emphasizes and gets them to think about how they can use what‘s already natural in them to do this. And so, these folks from all the five Gulf States that we‘re putting through this training come from various agencies in those states.

And they don‘t do this every day for a living. They do other types of things, whether they‘re fisheries people or whether they are food inspectors. And so, a couple of quick days of going through this and going through the testing that they‘re put through, they come out with a lot of sensory memory.

MADDOW: And do some people have a natural—more natural affinity for sniffing? Do you find out after you do the training that there are some people who have like star noses?

WOJTALA: Yes, that‘s absolutely correct. A lot of the folks that are going through the training and we‘ve put about 60 people through the training already in the last three weeks, in order to increase the capacity of people out there that can do this, they come out of this as being screeners. So they can go out now in their normal jobs and do a lot of screening and find problems that are out there, or detect things that they couldn‘t before.

But then there are—there‘s additional training that can take place where they can become assessors, trained assessors, or even experts at some point, and that all depends on how good their God-given talents are.

MADDOW: When in a non-training environment, once the folks who have been through your training are out in the field, how do they—how do they actually test the seafood?

Are they smelling, tasting, both? How much of a sample are they smelling or tasting at a time?

WOJTALA: Well, one of the things they learn in the class is that the environment has to be controlled in—when you're doing this testing. So it's somewhat difficult when you're out in the heat and the humidity and on a boat, let's say, that there's diesel fumes and there's other types of odors. It's a lot harder to do that.

So, it's always encouraged to do that in a lab setting. Sometimes, that's not always possible, but a lot of the assessments that are made—or all of the assessments that are made in terms of opening and closing waters—that's taking place in a laboratory setting where a lot of those environmental factors can be controlled.

MADDOW: And you've got these incredibly well-calibrated human testing machines alongside all of the mechanical ones which is how we all imagined this was done. It's fascinating stuff.

Gerry Wojtala, Executive Director for the International Food Protection Training Institute—thank you for your time and good luck with this.

WOJTALA: Thank you, Rachel…" **End of Partial Transcript**

Additional Online Information:

- **Gerry Wojtala, Executive Director for the International Food Protection Training Institute**

  IFPTI http://www.ifpti.org/about.cfm Non-Profit Funded by Private Corporation

  Started Operation 2009

  IFPTI Home Page http://www.ifpti.org/

  Press Release Posted: Friday, June 18, 2010 (Home Page Posting)

  IFPTI Missions Statement http://www.ifpti.org/mission.cfm

  IFPTI Training Information http://www.ifpti.org/training.cfm

  IFPTI Collaborators+Funding http://www.ifpti.org/partners.cfm

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Sniffing Out Oil In Raw Seafood

Written by WGNO ABC26 News June 17, 2010

“…Would you rely on your nose to tell you what's safe for dinner? NOAA says finely tuned noses are in demand right now. ABC26 News Reporter Vanessa Bolano is sniffing out the details.

We all like the smell of a home cooked meal, but since the oil spill, how do you know what you're eating is safe? Leave it up to screeners.

"I never thought I'd be here, at this point, learning to detect the taint in the seafood," says student Julie Anderson.

Anderson has just one of the finely tuned noses trained to "Sniff out" traces of oil in raw seafood before it makes it to on your dinner plate.

Student Jon Bell says, "Even though it seems obvious, 'Oh it smells like oil,' we're dealing with products that may have very, very low thresh holds to be able to identify so that we can maintain the safety of the seafood for the nation. "NOAA and the International Food Protection Training Institute offer the classes they call "Efficient" in Pascagoula.

Gerald Wojtala, Executive Director of IFPTI, says "If there is something detected at a very low level we can stop it there."

Everyone in Thursday's session will be working in Louisiana. Students say it's not as easy as it looks because the smells can give you a headache.

To cleanse senses students smell fresh foods like watermelon, cucumber, or corn. They say those foods recalibrates the nose.

Sensory detection is no new phenomenon. What's different now is the smell. Screeners are given vials of crude from the source to remind their nose what it's looking for.

The training sessions started two weeks ago. So far, 60 noses have graduated. Classes focusing on oil detection in the Gulf are expected to continue for more than a year…” End

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FPTI in the News: Christian Science Monitor
http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2010/0615/Gulf-seafood-safety-inspections-ramp-up-as-oil-spill-spreads

Posted: Wednesday, June 16, 2010

Gulf Seafood Safety Inspections Ramp Up as Oil Spill Spreads

By Mark Guarino June 15, 2010Gulf seafood safety inspections ramp up as oil spill spreads

NOAA and the FDA are teaming up to devise better guidelines for when federal waters should be closed because of the oil spill, and how Gulf seafood should be inspected.

Seafood inspection off the Gulf of Mexico is intensifying this week as the federal government allocates more resources to preventing harvests contaminated by the BP oil spill from reaching US dinner plates and restaurants.

Related Stories

- BP oil spill poses growing worry for US seafood restaurants
- New Orleans without seafood gumbo? Oil spill's unsavory toll.
- Oil spill: What is the threat to Gulf of Mexico seafood?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are together orchestrating a more thorough system of checks and balances that includes water and seafood sampling, dockside inspection, and a renewed rigor in reviewing when federal waters can be reopened.

The efforts reflect the aggressive, multiagency approach President Obama is expected to emphasize in his Oval Office speech Tuesday evening. Monica Allen, a spokeswoman with NOAA, said “the level of collaboration is definitely ramped up” between the two agencies in the Gulf effort – a situation she described as “extraordinary.”

'First line of defense'

The “strongest and the first line of defense” against preventing tainted seafood from making it to shore is the closure of federal waters, says Ms. Allen. To date, 32 percent of federal waters in the Gulf are closed to fishing.

To determine what areas should be opened and closed, federal officials use aerial monitoring and water sampling to track the oil’s movement. Those efforts will now be in tandem with a dockside inspection program of random screenings of fish caught outside the prohibited areas.

Before the April 20 Deepwater Horizon blowout, NOAA only conducted seafood screenings at Gulf ports for a fee and at the request of wholesale buyers to ensure the safety of their product.

The renewed dockside screenings will include workers trained as “sniffers” who will be able to evaluate if the catch is contaminated by its odor. “It’s the most sensitive forms of testing … if it fails that taint test, it’s out,” Allen says.

Starting last week and continuing though this week, more than 50 workers from agencies and organizations as varied as the Louisiana State University Department of Food Science to the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, are undergoing training at the National Seafood Inspection Laboratory in Pascagoula, Miss.

There, they will be instructed how to use the smell test to detect hydrocarbons in seafood – a technique that can be used not only at dockside, but also for inspections in restaurants and processing facilities.

The sniffing technique is common and was used following the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, says Joan Bowman, a spokesperson with the International Food Protection Training Institute, a nonprofit in Battle Creek, Mich., that is partnering with NOAA and the FDA.

It allows inspectors to evaluate “a large amount of product very quickly and very cost efficiently as opposed to sending a lot of seafood to a lab for testing, which is time consuming and expensive,” she says.

Samples collected at dockside will also be sent to the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, a NOAA facility in Seattle, for chemical evaluation.

More agents in the Gulf

The FDA is sending 50 agents into the Gulf region to help at all points of the screening process, said Meghan Scott, a spokesperson for the agency. They are expected to work alongside NOAA inspectors at dockside to monitor oysters, crab, and shrimp.

The FDA is also deploying a mobile laboratory to Tallahassee, Fla., where it will conduct chemical testing of sea life. Regional FDA laboratories in Arkansas, California, Florida, Arizona, and Wisconsin will also be running samples by the end of June.

The results of the exhaustive sampling and screening process by both agencies will be used to redraft the protocol determining what factors are needed to reopen closed waters.

On Tuesday the US Coast Guard seized about 19,000 pounds of shrimp from a boat illegally operating inside closed waters off the Louisiana coast. **End of Article**

IFPTI and NOAA Provide Additional Seafood Sensory Training for Officials in Gulf States Affected by BP Oil Spill

Posted: Tuesday, June 15, 2010

PASCAGOULA, MS- International Food Protection Training Institute (IFPTI) and NOAA’s Fisheries Service will provide seafood sensory training at NOAA's National Seafood Inspection Lab in Pascagoula, MS on June 16 and 17. The program will provide hands-on training with actual seafood products to develop skills in sensory detection for taint in seafood exposed to oil in the Gulf of Mexico. Food safety professionals from all 5 Gulf states have participated in the 2-day program.

- **Professor Edward Overton, School of the Coast and Environment – Coastal Sciences**

  June 22, 2010 LSU Website

Dr. Overton is a very productive scholar with a long, sustained, and distinguished record of research, teaching and service at LSU. As an international and nationally known researcher in analytical-environmental chemistry, he is a leading authority in gas chromatography. He has authored and co-authored about 100 papers, which have appeared in prestigious journals in his fields, and has garnered over 10 million dollars in grants from federal and state agencies over the years.

In addition to being an accomplished researcher, Dr. Overton's dedication, enthusiasm, and patience as a teacher have earned him consistently high evaluations from his students. His professional service record is equally impressive, though he himself is very low-key about it. He was the director of the Institute of Environmental Studies, setting the foundation of the current department. He has contributed tirelessly and continuously in research, teaching, grant activities, and service.

Florida State University

Ian MacDonald

Ian MacDonald, Ph.D. is the Chair of the Symposium and Technical and Environmental Panel. He is a professor in the Department of Oceanography at Florida State University. His research combines observations from submersibles with satellite imaging to understand the role of natural hydrocarbon releases in the carbon cycle. Much of this work has been focused in the Gulf of Mexico and has been applied in scientific management of offshore energy industry.

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- **William Mahan of the University of Florida**

  What is his connection with University of Florida?

  What is his connection with International Food Protection Training Institute?

  Why is he promoting smell testing for seafood testing in Gulf of Mexico?

Rosalind Note June 22, 2010: "Smell Tests for Fish Sounds Fishy"