

Are any Florida state waters closed to fish harvesting?

Yes, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission has issued an executive order (6/14/2010) to temporarily close a portion of the coastal state waters offshore of Escambia County to the harvest of saltwater fish, crabs and shrimp.

The closure includes state waters from the beaches to 9 nautical miles into the Gulf from the Alabama state line east to the Pensacola Beach water tower. Recreational catch and release fishing is still allowed as long as saltwater fish are not harvested or possessed in the closed area. Interested parties should continue to monitor the Commissions web page, <http://myfwc.com/OilSpill/index.htm> for the latest information.

Is seafood from Florida's Gulf coast safe to eat?

All seafood sold in Florida retail stores, supermarkets and restaurants remain safe to consume. Traditional food safety controls have been supplemented with additional emergency response plans by the pertinent federal, state and county authorities. Control measures include monitoring of the harvest waters and products, cautionary closures of certain waters and fisheries, analytical and sensory monitoring of products, and public advisories. Likewise, seafood will be provided from many areas that are not subject to potential exposure to the oil spill.



How do authorities determine the safety of seafood that may be exposed to an oil spill?

Standard analytical tests involving sophisticated laboratory instrumentation are used to detect a variety of potential chemical contaminants associated with water, sediments and seafood that have been exposed to oil spills. Likewise, special sensory methods have been developed and successfully used by trained experts to detect certain aromas in seafood exposed to oil spills. The associated contaminants emit strong and easily detected aromas such that sensory monitoring can be cost-effective and more immediate than the more prolonged analytical procedures. Together, the analytical tests and sensory methods have provided proven measures for product safety. These methods are available through the responsible federal and state programs and various academic research programs that are being positioned for response about the Gulf region.

Should I eat seafood that I catch for myself and family?

In the event of any contamination, state authorities will try to restrict local harvest and recreational activities to coastal waters that are declared open and approved. Public advisories will be posted and broadcast through many agencies, radio stations and televised news. Progressive updates and contact information will be posted on various websites such as the site maintained by the **Florida Department of Environmental Protection**.



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Fishermen should monitor and abide by any closed areas and avoid areas with obvious signs of oil contamination on the surface of the water, or on the neighbouring beaches and vegetation. Also it is not prudent to eat fish that look distressed, are behaving in a strange manner, or have been found dead. The contaminants associated with an oil spill can be detected with simple sensory checks for odors. Any fish or seafood with an oily, fuel-like odor, either when raw or cooked, should not be eaten, and should be reported to authorities.

Will local seafood be contaminated by the oil spill?

If exposed to the various types of chemicals associated with the oil spill, certain coastal marine animals can be killed or contaminated. The amount of exposure will vary depending on the type of oil present and type of seafood involved. Previous experience from other oil spills about the world indicates that some of the more mobile species can detect and avoid the contaminants, but other slower, burrowing and bottom-dwelling species are more susceptible to exposure. Exposure can be directly from the water, through the aquatic food chain, and/or from contaminated sediments.

Will all exposed seafood remain contaminated?

Once exposure ceases, many marine animals can gradually eliminate the contaminants encountered in an oil spill. The rate of elimination can vary from days to months depending on the amount and type of oil exposure and the metabolism of the particular animals. The levels of contamination will be progressively monitored by authorities before, during and after exposure to assure seafood safety before allowing commercial and recreational harvest.