

DELTA
MERCURY EXPOSURE REDUCTION PROGRAM

PROCEDURE
FOR
FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORY SIGN POSTING

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Prepared by
Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN

DELTA CONSERVANCY

A California State Agency

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PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to ensure that Delta MERP fish consumption advisories are posted and tracked at MERP-designated sites throughout the Delta. The Delta MERP advisories were developed using advisories issued by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) with guidance on the specific types and amount of Delta fish that can be safely consumed by vulnerable groups in the population. The Delta MERP Posting Project seeks to remedy the lack of accessible information about methylmercury (the methylated form of mercury) in fish frequently caught in the Delta waterways. The focus is to identify and include vulnerable populations and those who serve them, including health care professionals serving families, local parks, local fishing clubs, and tribal leaders. Using an innovative approach, Delta MERP will inform and involve agencies and organizations to assist with posting the Advisory signs at various locations throughout the Delta where people are fishing or boating.

MERCURY AND HUMAN HEALTH

While fish is a highly nutritious food and an important part of a healthy diet, many types of fish caught in the Delta and other California waterbodies contain methylmercury, the methylated form of mercury. Nearly all fish contain traces of methylmercury. However, larger fish that have lived longer have the highest levels of methylmercury because they have had more time to accumulate it. These large fish pose the greatest risk to children and pregnant women who eat them regularly. Methylmercury is a toxicant that is harmful to the brain and nervous system of infants, children and the developing fetus. Everyone should limit or avoid fish that have high levels of methylmercury, but it is especially important for women ages 18–45 and children ages 1–17.

FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORY

To protect the public's health, fish consumption advisories have been issued for the following Delta regions: the Sacramento River and Northern Delta, Central and Southern Delta, and the San Joaquin River. These advisories provide guidance on the specific types and amounts of Delta fish that can be safely eaten from the specified region. Fish consumption advisories are field-tested for comprehension.

Because reducing methylmercury levels in the Delta will take a long time, activities are needed in the interim to address the mercury-related health risks to consumers of Delta fish. Posting the consumption advisories will help women who are pregnant (or may become pregnant), breastfeeding mothers, and parents of young children make informed choices when it comes to fish that is healthy and safe to eat.

PROCEDURE FOR POSTING SIGNS

STEP 1. IDENTIFY AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS

Identify agency and organization partners to provide broad, community-based support for the project. Partnering agencies and organizations are engaged in addressing Delta watershed issues, public health, environmental justice, water recreation, fishing and posting fish consumption advisories, and Delta MERP is aligned with their organizational missions and goals. These organizations were contacted at the initiation of the project so they are empowered and involved in this effort.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY POSTING LOCATIONS

Identify posting locations in collaboration with project partners, and stakeholders. Collective brainstorming of a comprehensive inventory of possible posting locations is primarily based on three parameters:

1. Locations near 303(d) listed waterbodies for mercury impairment; most of Delta waterways are on the 303(d) List.
2. Locations are accessible to vulnerable populations and those who serve them.
3. Feasibility, including geographic distance and accessibility.

This step entails outreach focused on identifying and prioritizing sign locations, as well as partnering in sign-posting efforts and identifying entities' roles in sign-posting. For example, state and federal agencies, county environmental health departments, regulated dischargers, and non-profit environmental organizations are providing in-kind services to support posting of the advisory signs.

To ensure broad community support for the project, posting locations were vetted with community leaders, fish agencies (Department of Fish and Wildlife), local health organizations and tribal representatives, all of whom may have knowledge of the watersheds.

The Delta MERP posting locations focus on fishing areas with high levels of use and thus have potential for greater visibility of posted information. Indirect posting at marinas, sporting goods stores, and bait and tackle shops can increase visibility of information and should be considered if resources are available.

Delta MERP Advisory Signs: The advisory signs are based on information from the current fish consumption advisories for the Delta developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). There are three different sign designs to correspond to the three different OEHHA advisory regions in the Delta; Central/South Delta, Sacramento

River/North Delta and San Joaquin River. Delta MERP conducted focus groups to test sign design elements and evaluate comprehension of the signs. The signs are stored at the Regional Water Board office prior to posting. The size of the signs are approximately 21"x 24"x ¼". We anticipate posting up to 150 signs at various locations in the Delta.

STEP 3: ENGAGE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

Engaging and educating community members about this project is a critical step to improve and promote community awareness about contaminated fish in the Delta. Concurrent with Steps 1 and 2, Delta MERP agencies will reach out to community members to provide consumption guidance on locally caught fish and to attract volunteers for advisory sign posting events. To achieve this, a timeline should be made available to communities that include information regarding fish consumption advisories, mercury impaired water bodies, and a brief description of the project. Whenever possible, public presentations should be made to communities and groups, including but not limited to federal and state agencies, local environmental organizations, fishing clubs, and youth groups. The goal of these presentations is to educate a diverse range of community stakeholders about mercury pollution and to attract volunteers to take action to protect public health.

STEP 4: COORDINATE POSTING ADVISORY SIGNS WITH AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

To successfully post fish consumption advisories, Delta MERP will schedule meetings or contact agencies and organizations that offered or committed to post the advisory signs. The Delta MERP agencies will follow up with partnering organizations by sending an email with a project description, list, or number of locations for posting in their region and request each organization to provide the information in bullet points below:

- Provide a brief description of the posting location.
- Provide a brief description of the physical structure that the sign will be posted on and any considerations regarding needs for hardware materials/equipment for posting.
- Confirm that these sites have good public access and high visibility for people who may be fishing and consuming the fish that they catch.
- Provide the contact name, phone, and email for the staff member that will act as the site lead (duties listed below), as well as a physical address for your organization.
- Provide any helpful information for planning logistics or the importance of posting at each location.
- Let us know which of the following three advisories for the Delta should be posted at each location: (1) the Sacramento River and Northern Delta (2) the Central and Southern Delta, or (3) the San Joaquin River. If you recommend multiple signs, please recommend how many signs should be posted.

List of Actions for Site Leads

- Provide specific information for posting at the locations you have selected (see the bullet points above).
- Pick-up the sign(s) from the Conservancy's office in West Sacramento, or from the Regional Board office in Rancho Cordova.
- Post the sign(s) at designated location(s).
- Take a photo of the posted sign, taking care to include any distinguishing features in the background.
- Check on the status of the sign(s) at 6 and 12 months after the posting and report back to the Conservancy on the condition of the sign(s) and whether a replacement(s) is needed.
- Pick up a replacement sign(s) from the Conservancy or the Regional Board and repost a sign(s) if necessary.

STEP 5: PLAN AND PUBLICIZE POST-IT DAY EVENT

The Post-It Day Event will be a coordinated event when partnering organizations and agencies will post the fish consumption advisory signs at their designated locations at which they have agreed to post signs. Delta MERP will contact partnering organizations and community-based organizations to get input regarding the Post-It Day Event. Delta MERP will hold regular communications or meetings with project partners over the course of 1-2 months before the Post-It Day to coordinate activities for when signs are posted and conduct site visits after postings are completed. These meetings are essential to creating a unified Public Relations (PR) campaign and brainstorming volunteer recruitment strategies, as well as giving general updates and reminders about project tasks and timelines.

Early identification of a clear "slogan" is fundamental for designing attractive event materials to solicit volunteers from partnering organizations via email and social media.

The Delta MERP Post –It Day slogan is "Eat Fish Safely."

Approximately one month prior to the Post-It Day Event information about the event will also be posted on the social media of project partners during the week leading up to the event.

Clear instructions will be provided for Post-It Day event volunteers. It is recommended that partner agencies and organizations assemble Post-it Day bins with all materials volunteers might need to complete the posting task. The bin should include fish consumption advisory signs, hardware materials to post advisories (drills, nails, and other useful supplies); instructions explaining specifically where and how to post the signs; GoogleMaps print-outs with directions to the site(s) where volunteers will be posting signs; event organizers' contact information (in case questions or emergencies arise while volunteers are in the field); a list of talking points to

use if volunteers encounter interested public in the field; and outreach or educational materials that volunteers can give interested public in the field for more information.

STEP 6: HOLD VOLUNTEER POST-IT DAY EVENT

Agencies will hold volunteer posting events that will result in fish consumption advisory signs being posted at public access points. To ensure adequate time to achieve posting goals, a Post-It Day event will commence in the morning of the scheduled day. The schedule will allow for a short educational presentation and logistical details to be accomplished with adequate time for volunteers to travel into the field and post the fish consumption advisories. Whenever possible, local public health officials should be made aware of the event in advance and invited to participate on Post-it Day. A key component of event day education should be teaching participants how to properly read and interpret fish consumption advisories. This will allow for increased outreach capacity by giving volunteers the ability to teach others in the community how to safely consume locally caught fish.

Each group of volunteers should be provided with a pre-packed materials bin that includes instructions for posting and information specific to their site assignments with printed driving instructions. Photographs of the posted advisory will be taken as documentation of successful posting, using a camera or cell phone.

Volunteers should fill out a data card about every location where a sign is posted, including:

1. Description of location where an advisory sign was posted.
2. Attached or emailed photos of posted sign.
3. Geographic coordinates of the sign location (latitude/longitude).
4. Any additional notes, such as materials used or suggestions for future

STEP 7: POST-IT DAY EVENT FOLLOW-UP

Post-It Day event follow-up should include an immediate media campaign to publicize the success of the event and continue to raise awareness on the issue of mercury in fish. The media campaign can consist of a press release issued to local newspapers complete with photographs and should include information on specific location posted, the number of advisories posted, the number of volunteers who participated, and a guide on how to interpret the advisories. Further follow-up should be conducted to thank volunteers and local leadership who participated in the event, along with information about how to stay involved with these efforts.

STEP 8: MONITORING

To ensure continued visibility of the advisories, Delta MERP will monitor and track the physical status of the advisories, including the need for replacements.

Delta MERP will contact the site leaders six months after posting activities are completed to collect information and status for each posting location, which will be tracked in a spreadsheet. A photo will be taken and sent to Delta MERP each time the sign is inspected to ensure the sign is still present and the condition of the signs is acceptable.

Delta MERP will develop and conduct surveys with target populations to evaluate whether the signs are being viewed and the information and various messages are understood by the public. This data will be used to inform and improve potential future advisory sign development and posting, if resources are available.