

Study shows subsistence seafood safe

Spill area analyzed

Subsistence food source samples taken from villages affected by the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill generally tested "clean" and not affected by the spill, according to a recent report from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

But the FDA cautions in its report that only a limited number of samples were tested in this pilot study and that additional monitoring of various species and locations is needed to study the long-range situation and better characterize any petroleum residues present.

Toward this end, the FDA, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are assisting with a more extensive and longer term project funded by Exxon and run by the scientific consulting firm of Dames and Moore.

The FDA's report summarized the analysis of 13 samples of subsistence resources harvested in May 1989 in areas near Tatitlek, Chenega Bay, English Bay and Port Graham.

The FDA is the federal agency responsible for evaluating food safety. The tests were part of a pilot project begun by the Division of Subsistence of ADF&G in collaboration with the villages and the FDA.

The goal of the pilot study was to sample and test subsistence foods from areas important to village harvesters for signs of contamination and potential health risks caused by the oil spill and to provide the villages with information they can use to decide whether to continue subsistence harvests for certain resources in their harvest areas.

The tests for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons — PAHs — on 10 samples found no PAHs or very low PAH levels. For the seven finfish tested, all the PAH levels were within the range found in uncontaminated fish. The PAH levels for the three shellfish (clams and octopus) were higher than the finfish and slightly higher than levels usually found in shellfish from uncontaminated areas.

But, according to Dr. Fred Shank, the director of the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, "these levels are lower than those found in many other foods."

ADF&G is continuing to urge residents to avoid any seafood that smells or tastes of petroleum. If the seafood appears clean by these methods, they are almost certainly safe to eat.