

Be Mindful of Mercury this Fishing Season

Written by Clean Wisconsin
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Mercury contamination remains a serious issue for Wisconsin's anglers, public health.

MADISON - On Saturday, May 7, anglers will take to Wisconsin's lakes and rivers for the official start of the fishing season. While this weekend's fishing opener is a favorite pastime of many Wisconsinites and a way to honor our state's natural heritage, it also serves as a reminder that anglers need to be mindful of their catch and what they put on their tables.

"Unfortunately, mercury contamination is a serious issue for Wisconsin's lakes and the anglers who enjoy fishing on them," says Keith Reopelle, senior policy director for Clean Wisconsin. "Because every inland body of water in Wisconsin is under a fish consumption advisory due to high levels of mercury contamination, it's critical that anglers check [the state's safe-eating guidelines](#) before frying up their catch."

Burning coal is the single largest source of mercury, which accumulates in waterways, building up in fish and the birds and animals that eat them. Mercury concentrations increase with every step in the food chain; larger predatory fish have the highest levels of mercury. A powerful neurotoxin, mercury has been linked to nervous system, liver and kidney problems. Fetuses and young children are especially at risk of harm to their developing nervous systems if exposed to mercury, affecting cognitive abilities.

"The health risks of mercury are undeniable, yet more than 1,500 pounds of mercury is emitted into Wisconsin's air each year," says Reopelle. "Fortunately, there are a number of policies in place and laws under consideration that would reduce mercury emissions and better protect the health of Wisconsin families and visitors."

In 2008, Clean Wisconsin [adopted a rule](#) legislation that mandated coal-fired power plants cut mercury emissions 90% by 2015. And just last month Clean Wisconsin, along with Sierra Club, [reached a settlement](#) with the DNR and Wisconsin Public Service to ensure mercury reductions are achieved at the Weston 4 power plant in Rothschild.

In addition, the Clean Power Plan, a set of rules limiting emissions from coal-fired power plants, could keep more than 400 pounds of mercury out of Wisconsin's air and water by 2030 if implemented. EPA estimates that for every \$1 spent on reducing mercury emissions, [public](#)

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reaps \$9 in benefits.

“Reducing mercury pollution isn’t just an environmental issue. There are tangible public health and economic benefits to reducing mercury emissions,” says Reopelle. “It is time for Wisconsin and the nation to move forward on enacting these laws and policies to further protect our families and communities from the ill effects of mercury pollution.” Learn more about [mercury pollution with our Enviropedia](#), a free resource on environmental issues.

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*On behalf of its more than 30,000 members, supporters and its coalition partners, Clean Wisconsin protects and preserves Wisconsin's air, water and natural heritage.
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