

# Updating Washington's Fish Consumption Rate

*Washington uses one of the lowest fish consumption rates in the nation to set water pollution limits, but has some of the highest fish-consuming populations in the nation.*



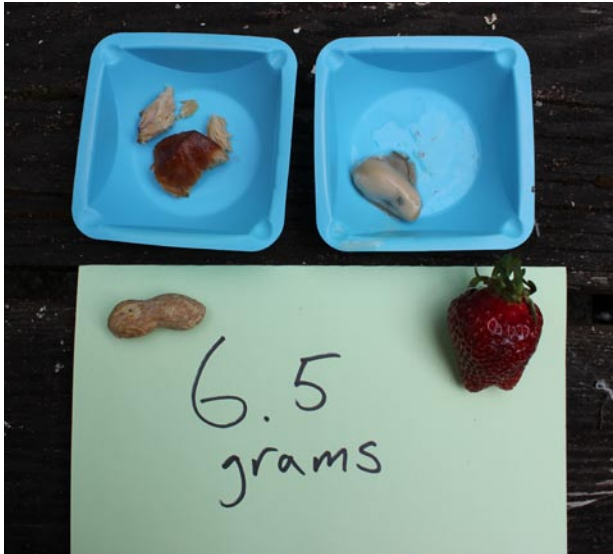
**F**ish consumption rates are an estimate of the amount of fish and shellfish that people eat. The rates are the basis for environmental cleanup and pollution prevention standards. It is an important tool for making sure fish is safe to eat.

The Washington Department of Ecology is reviewing fish consumption rates to revise inaccurate default rates that have been in effect for more than 20 years. Revised fish consumption rates will be incorporated into the state's toxic cleanup and water quality standards.

This process presents an opportunity to improve statewide standards for controlling pollution and cleaning up the environment.

Fish consumption rates are different from the fish health advisories that are issued occasionally by the state's health department. Health advisories describe how much fish is safe to eat before pollutants pose a risk to human health. Fish consumption rates, on the other hand, should prevent pollution from entering Washington waters in the first place.

# How much fish do you consume?



Current Washington State FCR



Current Oregon State FCR

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### **Why does Washington need to increase its fish consumption rate (FCR)?**

Washington is one of nine states with the lowest fish consumption rate in the country, yet its residents are among the biggest consumers of fish.

Current fish consumption rates were developed decades ago. They are not accurate and do not adequately protect public health. This is especially true for high consumers of fish and shellfish such as Indian tribes, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and others.

Many Washington residents believe it is pollution that should be limited, not the amount of fish and shellfish that we eat.

### **What is the current fish consumption rate in Washington?**

An FCR of about 6.5 grams per

day of fish and shellfish is used to set water quality standards in Washington.

Oregon recently increased its FCR to 175 grams per day.

### **How will a higher fish consumption rate benefit Washington residents?**

Health officials say that fish and shellfish are important parts of a healthy diet. The American Heart Association recommends eating fish or shellfish twice per week. However, the current fish consumption rate doesn't adequately protect consumers from toxic pollutants, such as mercury, dioxins and pesticides. The more unprotected fish, shellfish and water consumed, the greater the risk to human health.

FCRs are a factor in determining how much pollution is allowed

to enter Puget Sound and Washington's lakes and rivers. A clean environment is essential in maintaining the high quality and excellent reputation of Washington's seafood products.

Increasing the fish consumption rate will decrease the toxic pollution allowed in our rivers, lakes, and streams. A more protective fish consumption rate will allow everyone in Washington to enjoy the benefits of living in a region with cleaner water.

### **How will a higher fish consumption rate benefit the economy?**

Polluted waters hurt the state's economy. Clean water is essential to all industries statewide, not just fishing. Companies such as Boeing, Microsoft, Google and Amazon are able to attract highly skilled labor to the region because



*“Revising our state’s fish consumption standard is not just a tribal issue. It’s a public health issue that affects everyone who lives here.”*

**BILLY FRANK JR.**

Chairman

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

of the clean environment, outdoor opportunities and quality of life offered by a healthy Puget Sound.

Opponents of water quality protection cite economic costs as a reason for not protecting our food, while ignoring the economic value of clean water. The natural systems of Puget Sound contribute up to \$83 billion to the regional economy each year, according to Earth Economics, a non-partisan, non-profit organization. Failure to increase the fish consumption rate puts those dollars at risk.

**How do FCRs help protect salmon and other seafood resources?**

Salmon spend part of their lives at sea, but studies have shown that young out-migrating salmon from some Pacific Northwest rivers already have accumulated a significant amount of toxic contaminants. They carry this body burden in

their fatty tissues as they feed and grow to adulthood and become available for harvest.

Studies of adult salmon indicate that Puget Sound salmon have higher concentrations of legacy contaminants, such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs), than salmon from other parts of the Northwest. Although many legacy contaminants already are banned, these studies show that toxic substances in Washington waters are a threat to the health of salmon and the people who eat them.

Highers FCRs will prevent new contaminants from entering Washington waters and keep salmon and other seafood clean.

**What scientific data is used to estimate FCRs?**

State and federal agencies and tribes use dietary surveys to estimate the amount of fish that people

eat. For example, in a study by the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission, more than 500 tribal members were interviewed. The study design and analyses were peer-reviewed by the Centers for Disease Control and a panel of independent scientists from across the nation. Individual eating habits and other personal health data are confidential, but study results are available to the public.

**What can I do?**

The Washington Department of Ecology is the state agency in charge of developing state’s FCR. A number of opportunities for public input are available. To find out more, go to [www.ecy.wa.gov/toxics/fish.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/toxics/fish.html).

For videos and other information about why updating the FCR is important to tribes, visit [nwifc.org](http://nwifc.org).

### Why Many People are Advocating for a Higher FCR:

- Washington's rules and standards need to be revised to protect the health of all citizens. Fish consumption rates protect our freedom to safely fish, swim, recreate and work in our waters.
- The current fish consumption rate of 6.5 grams per day (less than one fish meal a month) is inaccurate and does not protect most Washington residents who eat fish.
- Ecology recommends an increase to 157-267 grams per day. This level would not adequately protect consumers of large amounts of seafood.
- Washington's rate should at least be as protective as Oregon's rate of 175 grams per day.



### For more information, contact:

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