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## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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### **Reissued to correct toxic level description units**

(Toxin levels have been reported at parts per million. Correct scientific terminology would be micrograms per hundred grams weight of shellfish meat. The risk reflected in the quantities remains the same.)

### **PSP investigation in Southeast continues; two men hospitalized**

*Scientists find highest levels of toxin ever recorded*

ANCHORAGE — As the state Section of Epidemiology investigation into a suspected incident of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) in Metlakatla continues, another recent investigation by marine scientists in Southeast Alaska revealed some of the highest levels of toxin ever recorded.

Meanwhile, two people with suspected PSP were admitted to a local hospital in Ketchikan on Wednesday. The two men both had symptoms of PSP after eating mussels harvested from Rotary Beach.

Toxic levels in shellfish are anything more than **80 micrograms of toxin per hundred grams of shellfish meat**. Baby mussels taken May 25, 2011, at a boat dock in Ketchikan had toxin levels estimated at over **30,000 micrograms per hundred grams** of shellfish meat.

“At those levels, a single mussel is enough to kill several people,” said Kate Sullivan, with the University of Alaska Southeast, a member of the Alaska Harmful Algal Bloom (AHAB) monitoring and early warning program — a partnership between UAS/UAF, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, other state and federal agencies, area commercial shellfish growers, and subsistence shellfish harvesters. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has provided funds to purchase toxin testing kits to aid in the response to this PSP outbreak.

According to Sullivan, “This is not a typical year by any stretch of the imagination.”

Scientists have tested mussels around Ketchikan and found levels above **5,000 micrograms per hundred grams**, butter clams at up to **2,000 micrograms per hundred grams**, and cockles at more than **1,100 micrograms per hundred grams**. According to scientists monitoring the algal bloom, butter clams and other shellfish can remain toxic for a long time. They have advised against anyone harvesting local shellfish.

State epidemiologists working in Metlakatla have posted signs warning of PSP at local stores, the post office, popular beaches, and boat launches. Police made announcements on maritime radio.

Early signs of PSP often include tingling of the lips and tongue. Symptoms may progress to tingling of fingers and toes, then loss of control of arms and legs, followed by difficulty breathing. Death can result in as little as two hours.

Paralytic shellfish poisoning is considered a public health emergency. Suspected cases must be reported immediately to the Section of Epidemiology by health care providers at 907-269-8000 during work hours or 800-478-0084 after hours.

For more information on PSP go to:

[http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/marine\\_toxins/](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/marine_toxins/), or

<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/dod/psp/ParalyticShellfishPoisoningFactSheet.pdf>

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