

Madison Environmental
Justice Organization

www.mejo.us

Requests/Questions for Lakes and Watershed Commission, Sept. 14, 2006

Members of the Madison Environmental Justice Organization met September 1 to discuss our concerns about fish consumption in Madison lakes. We look forward to seeing any available info about Monona Bay sediment and fish contamination presented at the Lakes and Watershed Commission meeting on the 14th. We also came up with several questions we would like the commission to address. These questions are below.

To provide some background for the discussion on the 14th, when I inquired in 2003 about the statement in the Lower Rock River Water Quality Management Plan that "the north shore of the bay is a mercury and PCB hotspot", Jim Amrhein sent me data from 1988 and 1992 (attached). The 1992 data showed the following levels at one of the Monona Bay sites (site 1A):

arsenic 47.5 mg/kg
copper 210 mg/kg
lead 170 mg/kg
mercury .58 mg/kg
PCBs .11 ug/g (In the 1988 data, one of the sites in Lake Monona (A2) had
PCB levels of .77 ug/g.

Another agency document, from 1988, reports the following levels of contaminants at site M11 in Monona Bay:

aroclor (PCBs) .66-.77 ug/g
arsenic 27-51 mg/kg
copper 120-140 mg/kg
mercury .84-1.1 mg/kg

Is one of these sites the purported toxic hotspot? In a 2003 email, Jim Amrhein assured me that these contaminant levels were well below other sites such as Green Bay/Fox River (a Superfund site) and therefore were not of concern. Our group, which includes several families who fish regularly on the north side of Monona Bay, would like to know why this area was designated as a "toxic hotspot"--regardless of how the levels compare to a superfund site. We would like to know what the health significance of eating fish that store these chemicals might be, and would like to see more recent sediment and fish monitoring data to see what the trends have been since 1992. We have been told by the DNR that there isn't any more recent data.

Contaminant levels in fish, as you know, can be much higher than in the sediments due to bioaccumulation. The fish monitoring data I received from Candy Schrank in 2004, which included relatively few fish tested in 1997 and 2002, show levels of mercury in fish from .1 ppm to .52 ppm for Monona and Mendota, and levels of PCBs from .045 to .46 ppm. While these levels may be "well within general consumption guidelines", according to Wisconsin agencies, people (especially women of childbearing age and children) should not consume very much fish with mercury levels at the higher end of this range. Moreover, some documents recommend more stringent standards--the EPA recommends that based on noncancer endpoints, people should not eat any fish with levels of PCBs over .39 ppm, and for cancer endpoints, people should not eat any fish with levels above .097ppm.

<http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/pcbs.pdf>.

As far as I know, no one has ever done a comprehensive survey of how much or what kind of fish anglers in Madison eat. My own research and MEJO's surveys indicate that it is a mistake to assume that shore anglers are only eating smaller fish like bluegill, crappie, and perch. While bluegill and crappie are popular, many of the shore anglers we have interviewed also regularly eat white bass, carp, catfish, walleye, and other larger fish more than once a month. Moreover, many of the African American anglers I've talked to eat 3-4 bluegill/crappie per meal, fried whole with the skin on. Some Hmong anglers also eat the whole fish--brain, organs, eyeballs, everything. This can make a difference as far as contaminant intake.

In any case, regardless of specific contaminant levels, all Wisconsin lakes are on mercury advisories, and communication about the advisories is critical. It is very clear from our research that most minority and poor anglers are not getting the fish advisories. None of the members of our group have never seen advisory signs at popular shore angling spots around Madison, such as Brittingham Bay or Monona Terrace. None of the community center staff (Kennedy Heights, Bayview) or public health nurses (on the Northside and Triangle neighborhoods) had seen these advisories before we started working with them.

Fish are a great local food source and fishing is a healthy family activity that is important in many cultures--European American, African American, Hmong, and Latino alike. We want people to continue eating fish from Madison lakes, but we want to know more about contaminant levels in the fish they are eating and what can be done to reduce these levels. In the meantime, we want anglers and their families to understand how to choose fish with lower contaminant levels. The high popularity of Madison lakes as a regional fishing destination (for subsistence and sport anglers) seems to make the analysis of contaminants in lakes and fish here an important public health issue, even if the levels of contaminants are not as high as they are in Green Bay.

We look forward to talking more about these issues and MEJO's questions (listed in the attached document) on September 14. Again, thanks for your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,

The Madison Environmental Justice Organization Steering Committee
Maria Powell
Jody Schmitz
VamMeej Yang
Jim Powell
Kazoua Moua

Member of the Madison Environmental Justice Organization would like to see the following questions addressed at the Lakes and Watershed Commission meeting on Sept. 14. **Since several members of the Hmong community are expected to attend this meeting, we ask that Hmong translation be provided.**

Our questions are the following:

1. Which site is the purported "toxic hotspot" in the DNR document? What are the possible sources of these contaminants?

2. Given these levels of contaminants in the sediments, can you model what the levels in several sizes of fish that lived near these sediments are likely to be (approximately)?
3. We would like a public health expert to share with us what they know about the potential health risks related to regular exposures to this combination of toxins (arsenic, copper, lead, mercury, PCBs), at the levels estimated in #2--to a typical Hmong woman (115 lbs?) who eats one white bass of average size per week? To her developing fetus? To a 5 year old child (eating the same amount)?
4. Madison lakes and sediments also contain polyaromatic hydrocarbons, brominated compounds, pharmaceuticals, and pesticides. Are any of these contaminants monitored in fish here? Will they be in the future?
5. When will sediments/fish in Madison lakes be monitored next? Which sites will be monitored? How do the DNR and other agencies make decisions about when, where, how often to monitor sediments and fish and which contaminants to monitor?
6. How and when do these agencies communicate monitoring results to anglers, media, and the public?
7. None of the shore anglers we are working with have ever seen any advisory signs along Madison lakes. Have signs ever been placed at popular shore angling sites around Madison lakes? If so, when, and why are they no longer there?
8. None of the anglers and families we are working with saw advisories before our project began. Have efforts ever been made to get fish advisories (translated for Hmong and Latino groups) out to community centers, neighborhood centers, and other places where minority and poor shore anglers might more easily access them?

Thank you in advance for addressing these questions.