

## Seafood Safety and Dispersants

**Summary: Current evidence shows that seafood from open Gulf waters is safe to eat.**

- ▶ To date, every seafood sample from reopened waters has passed sensory testing for contamination with oil and dispersant.
- ▶ Scientific data indicate that the dispersants used to combat the oil spill break down rapidly and become highly dispersed in Gulf waters.
- ▶ Scientific data to date indicate that dispersants do not accumulate in seafood.
- ▶ Dispersants were not applied in areas currently being considered for reopening to fishing.
- ▶ Of almost 2,500 water samples analyzed for dispersants, only two samples showed a dispersant component, and they were in an area not being considered for reopening.

**Why Dispersants Were Used in the Gulf:** Dispersants served as an important tool to keep oil from impacting sensitive wetlands, beaches, and marshes. Dispersants were only used where oil was present and were last applied in the Gulf on July 19th.

**How Dispersants Were Applied:** Dispersants used in the BP Oil spill were applied at the surface and at the wellhead on the seafloor. A total of 1.8 million gallons of dispersant were used. That's one one-hundredth of the volume of oil that leaked into the Gulf.

**Dispersants Have Diluted and Biodegraded in Gulf Waters:** Dispersants are designed to dilute and biodegrade quickly. Water sampling in the Gulf shows that they're doing just that.

- NOAA and EPA have analyzed 2,195 water samples in the deep waters of the Gulf for components of dispersants. Only two samples showed a dispersant component, propylene glycol, at detectable levels in the water. Those samples were taken close to the wellhead on June 3 and June 5. That area is not currently being considered for reopening for fishing.
- In addition, EPA has evaluated 301 surface water samples for the presence of dispersant components. These water samples were collected near the shorelines. No dispersant-related compounds were detected in any of these samples.

**Expert Sensory Analysis:** Experts trained in sensory analysis have been testing Gulf seafood for the presence of contaminants. FDA, NOAA, and cooperating state labs have conducted additional chemical testing to detect oil contamination in seafood.

- To date, every seafood samples from reopened waters has passed sensory testing for contamination with oil and dispersant.

- The evaluation of scientific data to date indicate that the dispersants used in the Deepwater Horizon response are unlikely to build up in the flesh of the fish. This is primarily based on the assessment of their physical properties, which indicate that these compounds do not penetrate the gills or bodies of fish, and will not be concentrated in edible tissues of seafood.
- To further ensure that fishermen and consumers can have confidence in seafood from open Gulf waters, FDA and NOAA have expanded the sensory testing procedures. Sensory experts are trained to detect a combination of oil and dispersant and to note anything that generally should not appear in fish flesh. Even though we don't expect dispersants to be present where oil is not, the panelists' training has now been expanded to include training to detect dispersant alone.
- We do not expect sensory experts to find dispersant alone for several reasons:
  1. Dispersant was only used where there was oil present. Because of this, in sensory testing, the scent of oil would immediately be observed and would likely overpower the scent of dispersant. Sensory experts are trained to fail a sample with any oil scent.
  2. No dispersant has been applied to Gulf waters since July 19, and dispersant dilutes quickly.
  3. Of all the water samples tested, only two showed detectable levels of dispersant. The water samples that showed detectable levels were collected very near the wellhead where the dispersant was applied, which is not an area being considered for reopening.

**Future Research Related to Seafood Safety:** Out of an abundance of caution, and in order to gather additional information, further research is ongoing.

- NOAA is conducting additional studies to reaffirm that dispersants do not constitute a threat of accumulation in tissues of fish and shellfish and thus are not a risk to safety for human consumption of seafood harvested from the Gulf of Mexico.
- NOAA and FDA are currently developing a chemical test for dispersants in edible fish flesh and will continue to study the long-term impacts of chemical dispersants.
- The federal government will take any new, relevant information into account in assessing any potential risk to public health.