

The Lakehead Region Conservation Authority has partnered with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to conduct an education collaborative focused on Chemicals of Mutual Concern (CMCs). The Lake Superior Lakewide Action Management Plan 2022 – 2024 (LAMP) has developed action items to prevent and reduce chemical contaminant pollution in Lake Superior. The LAMP highlights the importance of education and outreach programs to inform the public of these concerning chemicals. The Fish Contaminants Education and Outreach collaborative is intended to familiarize residents with CMCs, review contaminants currently found in fish within the Thunder Bay Harbor and Lakehead Watershed, and outline actions that can be taken to prevent additional contaminants from being released into the basin.

Chemicals of Mutual Concern (CMCs) originate from human sources, and both Canada and the U.S. agree are potentially harmful to human health and the environment. CMCs are persistent and can bioaccumulate in the food web, where fish consumption has now become one of the known routes of exposure. To date, eight chemicals have been designated as CMCs. These chemicals enter Lake Superior through atmospheric deposition, point sources (municipal/industrial wastewater discharges and landfills), non-point sources (stormwater/surface runoff), and are released from existing contaminated bottom sediments.

Currently, the status and trends of contaminants in edible fish have been assessed ranked as “Fair and Unchanging” over the past ten years (ECCC and EPA, 2022). The Guide to Eating Ontario Fish was developed to provide consumption advice based on the level of contaminants found in fish according to location, species, and length. Consumption advisories indicate the maximum number of meals per month for general and sensitive populations (women of childbearing age and children under 15). Fish consumption advisories in Lake Superior are largely due to elevated levels of mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and in a few locations dioxins/furans and toxaphene (ECCC and EPA, 2022).

Throughout the education and outreach collaboration, the LRCA will be offering a limited number of schoolboard presentations, webinars, and sessions to disseminate information on this complex issue. The LRCA’s spring webinar will occur on April 14th, 2023, at 12 pm EST, tune in to learn more about fish consumption advisories and some of the other exciting projects the LRCA is piloting. To book an informational session for your classroom please contact the Education Coordinator at education@lakeheadca.com.

Stay tuned for the LRCA’s social media campaign which will release insightful facts and key information for the upcoming presentations. Further, the LRCA has partnered with Epica Pictures to create a short video highlighting chemicals of mutual concern and how community members can protect themselves and our waterways from contaminant exposure. Any anglers interested in debuting their catch in the film should contact the LRCA’s Environmental Planner at michellew@lakeheadca.com.

Source: Environment and Climate Change Canada and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2022. Lake Superior Lakewide Action and Management Plan, 2020-2024.

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