



Retail & Restaurant Alert Gulf Oil Spill Seafood Update

Washington, DC- July 2, 2010 This morning The Miami Herald published a story under the headline; [Oil found in Gulf crabs raises new food chain fears](#). It is important that retailers and restaurants become familiar with the entirety of this story and not just the headline.

No gulf seafood has been rejected from the market by regulators after testing positive for contaminants.

The oil reported on in this story was found in Gulf crab larvae. Larvae are clearly not harvested for human consumption and the natural ecological progression examined in this article notes that bigger fish eat the larvae and that would be the focal point of researchers. Again, no bigger fish have been rejected from the market by regulators after testing positive for contaminants despite thousands and thousands of tests.

It is imperative that consumers understand regulators like the Department of Marine Resources, quoted in this article, "continue to test the meat of shrimp and other edible species and have 'not gotten any positive hits' for oil."

While everyone agrees it is vitally important that researchers continue to monitor the full scope of the Gulf food chain, it is just as important people realize that efforts continue unabated to test "the edible tissue, for public health."

Miami Herald Report:

[Oil found in Gulf crabs raises new food chain fears](#)

By Geoff Pender

BILOXI, Miss. — University scientists have spotted the first indications oil is entering the Gulf seafood chain — in crab larvae — and one expert warns the effect on fisheries could last "years, probably not a matter of months" and affect many species.

Scientists with the University of Southern Mississippi and Tulane University in New Orleans have found droplets of oil in the larvae of blue crabs and fiddler crabs sampled from Louisiana to Pensacola, Fla. The news comes as blobs of oil and tar continue to wash ashore in Mississippi in patches, with crews in chartreuse vests out cleaning beaches all along the coast on Thursday, and as state and federal fisheries from Louisiana to Florida are closed by the BP oil disaster.

"I think we will see this enter the food chain in a lot of ways — for plankton feeders, like menhaden, they are going to just actively take it in," said Harriet Perry, director of the Center for Fisheries Research and Development at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. "Fish are going to feed on (crab larvae). We

have also just started seeing it on the fins of small, larval fish — their fins were encased in oil. That limits their mobility, so that makes them easy prey for other species. The oil's going to get into the food chain in a lot of ways."

Perry said researchers have not yet linked the hydrocarbons found in the crab larvae to the BP disaster, but she has little doubt it's the source. She said she has never seen such contamination in her 42 years of studying blue crab.

Richard Gollott is Mississippi's Department of Marine Resources commissioner for the commercial seafood industry and a seafood processing-plant owner from a family that's been in the business for generations. He said closure of Gulf fisheries "appears to have been the right thing to do."

"We are taking a beating with this," Gollott said. "But we would rather have our industry have a season closed down for a year or even two years rather than get a bad name. We have to take the long-term view. The worst thing in the world would be to take a short-term look at this and not be worried about the public, the consumers."

Gollott said he is still hopeful Gulf seafood can make a quick recovery, in "months instead of years," and be safe and plentiful. He said right now the only Gulf seafood he's supplying is coming from Texas, where fisheries are still clear and open.

"You've got to be optimistic to be a fisherman," Gollott said. "As quick as we can get our scientific facts and ducks in order, get FDA to check everything from Florida to Texas and make sure it's OK, I think we will get our market share back. But that will take some marketing and some work."

DMR Director Bill Walker said Thursday he was unaware of the USM-Tulane findings. He said DMR biologists continue to test the meat of shrimp and other edible species and have "not gotten any positive hits" for oil.

"But we are just testing the edible tissue, for public health," Walker said. "The more-academic research is looking at other parts of these critters. Sometimes materials will concentrate in the more oily tissue, but not make its way to the edible tissue."

Perry said the oil found in the crab larvae appears to be trapped between the hard outer shell and the inner skin. Perry said, "Shrimp, crab and oysters have a tough time with hydrocarbon metabolism." She said fish that eat these smaller species can metabolize the oil, but their bodies also accumulate it with continued exposure and they can suffer reproductive problems "added to a long list of other problems." BP-contracted crews cleaned tar balls and patches from mainland beaches on Thursday. Walker said there are reports of oil or tar on or near all the barrier islands, although still in relatively small, isolated patches — "small in the sense of up to several hundred yards at a stretch," Walker said.

Harrison County Emergency Manager Rupert Lacy said storms the last few days "shook (tar pieces) up, shifted them around," but cleanup workers "are doing what they need to do," and getting beaches cleaned.

"Until they can get that well capped off and they get those big skimmers out there and really get into the skimming operations, we're going to see the remnants of this," Lacy said. "This is not a sprint; it's a marathon."

Perry said scientists are having to learn as they go along with the BP oil disaster.

“We can go to literature and get information on other spills,” Perry said. “But this is not the same oil, this is not the same spill, this is not the same area and these are not the same species. Plus, the use of dispersant in the amounts they’ve used is totally unprecedented. So this is taking scientists a while to get up to speed and realize the enormity of it.”

As not only a marine scientist but a longtime Coast resident, Perry said the enormity of the disaster gets to her personally sometimes.

“I had a sort of breakdown last week,” Perry said. “I’ve driven down the same road on East Beach in Ocean Springs for 42 years. As I was going to work, I saw the shrimp fleet going out, all going to try to work on the oil, and I realized the utter futility of that, and I just lost it for a minute and had to gather myself.

“When you think about it all, how this has changed everybody’s life and how life here revolves around the water and the beach and the seafood — just even going to get a shrimp po-boy — it’s just overwhelming. I think a hurricane is easy compared to this.

“Let’s just hope and pray first that they get the well capped, then secondly that they keep it from getting inshore into our marshes.”