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Biotoxin Increase Closes Recreational Shellfish Harvest in Portage Bay

BELLINGHAM, WA — Due to unsafe levels of marine biotoxins, the Washington State Department of Health has added Portage Bay to the areas in Whatcom County closed to recreational harvest of molluscan shellfish.

The following areas are also closed:

- Birch Bay remains closed to all species of shellfish.
- Point Roberts beaches remain closed to all species.
- Bellingham Bay south to the Skagit County line, excluding Chuckanut Bay and Larrabee State Park, remain closed to butter and varnish clam harvest only.
- Chuckanut Bay and Larrabee State Park are closed due to pollution.

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly, so shellfish harvesters are advised to always check for current shellfish closures on the Washington Shellfish Safety Map (doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety) or to call the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington State.

Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters and scallops. During a biotoxin event, mussels and varnish clams usually contain the highest toxin concentration. Paralytic shellfish poisoning biotoxin and other biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Crab meat is not affected, but “crab butter” and crab entrails can harbor biotoxins so they should always be discarded.

Water color is not an accurate measure of shellfish safety. Algae that produce marine biotoxins cannot be seen and must be detected by laboratory testing. The Whatcom County Health Department routinely collects shellfish samples to monitor local biotoxin levels in coordination with the Washington State Department of Health.

Pollution-related closures occur when the level contaminants in the water, such as bacteria or viruses, are high enough to make people sick when they eat shellfish harvested from the area.

Shellfish sold in restaurants and retail markets are tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

More information about safely harvesting shellfish is available from the Washington State Department of Health at www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Shellfish/RecreationalShellfish.

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