INFORMATION ABOUT RADIATION AND WILD FOODS SAFETY IN ALASKA

April 27, 2011

The nuclear reactor accident in northeast Japan caused by the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami has raised some concerns about radiation from Japan reaching Alaska. Alaska's health, wildlife, and environmental agencies are working together to provide information for subsistence users, hunters, and anglers. We believe Alaska's people and animals are safe from harmful levels of radiation at this time. There are no urgent or likely signs of harmful levels of radiation reaching Alaska. This information will be updated if new information becomes available so please check back regularly.

SUMMARY

- **Land animals:** Alaska's land animals have not been exposed to harmful levels of radiation from Japan and are safe to eat. The only way for Alaska's land animals to be exposed to harmful levels of radiation is through the air. No harmful levels of radiation have been detected in Alaska's EPA air radiation monitors or at any other U.S. monitoring site.

- **Fish, marine mammals, shellfish, and seaweed:** Food harvested from the sea is very unlikely to have any harmful levels of radiation and is safe to eat. The great amount of water in the ocean quickly dilutes the concentration of harmful radioactive material. Cesium and iodine, the two most common radioactive isotopes coming from the damaged nuclear plant, do not build up in ocean food chains.

- **Wild birds and eggs:** Some birds that migrate from Japan to Alaska could have been exposed to radiation if in Japan at the time of (or since) the accident; however, the likelihood of birds or their eggs being harmful to eat is very low. The time between exposure and when hunting takes place in Alaska will allow birds to get rid of most of the harmful elements. A migratory bird exposed to high levels of radiation in Japan would likely die before reaching Alaska.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1) **What is being done to find out whether eating Alaska's migratory birds is harmful to our health because of radiation?** We are monitoring reports from Japan and gathering information.
   - We created a list of birds that could be exposed to harmful radiation in Japan and then fly to Alaska. Migratory Bird Lists are available at: alaska.fws.gov/ambcc/hunter.htm
   - We have gathered information on how radiation affects birds and animals based on other radiation accidents and events: the Chernobyl accident in the Soviet Union, and the past problems from nuclear processing facilities in the U.S. (Hanford in Washington and Savannah River in Georgia). We have learned that the risk of encountering an unsafe bird in Alaska is very low.

2) **What can I do to have less chance of being harmed by radiation from wild Alaska birds?** We believe the risk of radiation exposure from birds migrating from Japan to Alaska is very low.
   - If you are concerned about birds that may have been exposed to radiation and wish to avoid them, use the list of birds known to have no risk or only a small risk of exposure. Migratory Bird Lists are available at: alaska.fws.gov/ambcc/hunter.htm

- You can delay harvesting birds that are known to travel through Japan. Birds get rid of about half of the harmful radiation they were exposed to every 10 days unless the birds die.
- Do not pick-up or harvest dead birds or birds that look sick.

3) **Will cooking or freezing remove harmful radiation from wild foods and water?** No, cooking and freezing does not remove harmful radiation in food or water. However, we do not believe that there will be any unsafe levels of radiation reaching Alaska.

4) **Could I get harmful levels of radiation by drinking water that ducks or migratory birds have been in?** It is extremely unlikely**.** Water sources used by birds are not likely to pose a radiation risk.

5) **Is there any way for me to tell if a wild bird is carrying a dangerous level of radiation?** No, but in the unlikely event that a bird with a high level of radioactive contamination gets to Alaska, it may appear sick. There is no way to tell for certain if a bird contains radioactive isotopes without conducting scientific tests; however, there is no need to test birds at this time because the risk of them being contaminated is very small.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: There are no urgent or likely signs of harmful levels of radiation reaching Alaska, but other things can contaminate wild animals and water. Wild animals and water sources that appear healthy and clean can carry bacteria and parasites that can make you sick if not properly treated. Keep you and your family safe by following these basic safe food and water guidelines:

Guidelines for safe water treatment: www.dec.state.ak.us/eh/dw/dwmain/Treat.htm

Guidelines for safe handling and cooking of wild foods:

- Use rubber gloves when cleaning animals.
- Keep animals cool, clean, and dry.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke while cleaning animals.
- Avoid touching your mouth or eyes with your hands while handling animals.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water or alcohol wipes after cleaning or dressing animals.
- Clean all tools and surfaces immediately after use. Use hot soapy water, then disinfect with a 10 percent chlorine bleach solution (1½ cups of bleach added to 1 gallon of water).
- Cook animals thoroughly (internal meat temperature should reach 165° F, or until juices run clear) to kill disease organisms and parasites.

Report large numbers of dead or sick birds to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: 1-866-527-3358.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Radiation Information website: www.epi.alaska.gov/eh/radiation
- Migratory Bird Lists are available at: alaska.fws.gov/ambcc/hunter.htm
- Radiation Safety, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA): www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/PublicHealthFocus/ucm247403.htm
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Radiation Monitoring: www.epa.gov/japan2011/
- EPA air monitors in Alaska: www.epa.gov/radiation/rert/radnet-juneau-exp-rate.html
- Table of Radioisotopes That May Impact Food Resources: www.epi.alaska.gov/eh/radiation/RadioisotopesInFood.pdf
- World Health Organization (WHO) (Situation and monitoring reports on Japans damaged nuclear reactor: www.wpro.who.int/sites/eha/disasters/2011/jpn_earthquake/list.htm