

Fishing Santa Barbara:

Santa Barbara residents, visitors and recreational and commercial fishermen continue to enjoy open-ocean and other fishing around the Santa Barbara area, outside of the area closed for the Refugio oil spill response. The Channel Islands remain open as does the area west of Canada de Alegria around Pt. Conception, and from Sands Beach to the Santa Barbara County border with Ventura and beyond. Santa Barbara Harbor continues to accept commercial fishing vessels for the Santa Barbara fish market.

The fishery closure for the Refugio oil spill incident remains in effect from Canada de Alegria to Coal Oil Point. Fisheries remain closed until further notice. Fishing vessels transiting the area with live wells (a tank on a vessel in which live fish are placed) should stay more than six nautical miles off the coast and outside of the fishery closure area. Other vessel traffic may transit the area but no fishing on open water or from the shore is allowed in the [fishery closure area](#). Anglers are reminded to comply with the Marine Safety zone established for a six mile area, and 500 feet offshore of the response in Refugio.

Commercial fishermen and recreational anglers are reminded to comply with all fishing regulations as well as the Marine Protected Area restrictions.

Fishery Closure – It’s the law

California law requires that the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) evaluate the potential human health risks associated with eating seafood from areas where an oil spill of 42 gallons or more has occurred.

Science behind the closure

The science underlying the fishery closure and closure lift is very complex. Factors that influence the degree to which seafood may be contaminated include: physical and chemical characteristics, environmental and biological factors (including wind, water temperature, solar radiation, shoreline type), and species impacted.

Scientists use a process called “risk assessment” to determine what level of a chemical may cause health problems. This level is known as a “level of concern.” Chemical levels below the level of concern are considered safe.

Oil impacts on fish and shellfish

- Fish are less likely to come in contact with oil
- Oil usually floats on the surface and fish can often swim away
 - If exposed to oil, fish can remove oil chemicals from their bodies quickly
- Crustaceans (lobsters, crayfish, crabs, and shrimp) have some ability to move away from oil
 - If exposed to oil, they have a moderate ability to remove oil chemicals from their bodies
- Bivalve mollusks (mussels, clams, and oysters) are usually immobile and cannot move away from the oil
 - Bivalves have less ability to remove oil chemicals from their bodies
 - Bivalves are more likely to retain oil chemicals that pose more of a human health risk



Human health risk

Once a fishery is closed for more than 48 hours, OEHHA conducts an expedited human health risk assessment. This extensive process is used to determine whether the seafood in the area has accumulated unsafe levels of oil-spill related contaminants.

Sampling plan

Scientists create a sampling plan to evaluate the safety of the seafood.

It includes:

- Seafood species to be collected
- Dates, times, and locations of seafood collection
- Number of samples of each species to be collected
- Analytical methods to be used to test for oil chemicals

Seafood collection and testing

After a sampling plan is developed and approved, scientists from multiple state agencies participate in the collection of the seafood samples. Seafood from nearby, but unaffected, areas are also collected for comparison.

Results and when the closure lifts

If the concentration in seafood exceeds the level of concern, the fishery closure will remain in effect. Because oil chemicals levels in mollusks may not reach their highest level for some weeks after a spill, testing is usually repeated until it is clear that chemical levels are stable or declining. When chemicals levels are below the level of concern and no longer increasing, then OEHHA will recommend that the fishery closure be lifted.