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For Immediate Release:

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Seafood from Florida's Gulf Coast

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(Gainesville, Fla.) -- Many of the accounts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill have focused on potential impacts to the seafood industry and many consumers may have concerns about the potential contamination and safety of seafood they purchase. These are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions.

- **Is seafood from Florida's Gulf coast safe to eat?**

All seafood sold in Florida retail stores, supermarkets and restaurants will remain safe to consume prior to and during any potential exposure to contamination from the pending oil spill. Traditional food safety controls have been supplemented with additional emergency response plans by the pertinent federal, state and county authorities. Control measures include monitoring of the harvest waters and products, cautionary closures of certain waters and fisheries, analytical and sensory monitoring of products, and public advisories. Likewise, seafood will be provided from many areas that are not subject to potential exposure to the oil spill.

- **How do authorities determine the safety of seafood that may be exposed to an oil spill?**

Standard analytical tests involving sophisticated laboratory instrumentation are used to detect a variety of potential chemical contaminants associated with water, sediments and seafood that have been exposed to oil spills. Likewise, special sensory methods have been developed and successfully used by trained experts to detect certain aromas in seafood exposed to oil spills. The associated contaminants emit very strong and easily detected aromas such that sensory monitoring can be very cost-effective and more immediate than the more prolonged analytical procedures. Together, the analytical tests and sensory methods have provided proven measures for product safety. These methods are available through the

responsible federal and state programs and various academic research programs that are being positioned for response about the Gulf region.

- **Should I eat seafood that I catch for myself and family?**

In the event of any contamination, state authorities will try to restrict local harvest and recreational activities to coastal waters that are declared open and approved. Public advisories will be posted and broadcast through many agencies, radio stations and televised news. Progressive updates and contact information will be posted on various websites such as the site maintained by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, (<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/default.htm>.)

Recreational fishermen should avoid areas with obvious signs of oil contamination on the surface of the water, or on the neighboring beaches and vegetation. Also, it is not prudent to eat fish that look distressed, are behaving in a strange manner, or have been found dead. The contaminants associated with an oil spill can be detected with simple sensory checks for odors. Any fish or seafood with an oily, fuel-like odor, either when raw or cooked, should not be eaten, and should be reported to authorities.

- **Will local seafood be contaminated by the oil spill?**

There is no contamination at this time, but predictions suggest the leaking oil could accumulate and reach the Florida coasts. If exposed to the various types of chemicals associated with the oil spill, certain coastal marine animals can be killed or contaminated. The amount of exposure will vary depending on the type of oil present and type of seafood involved. Previous experience from other oil spills about the world indicate that some of the more mobile species can detect and avoid the contaminants, but other slower, burrowing and bottom-dwelling species are more susceptible to exposure. Exposure can be directly from the water, through the aquatic food chain, and/or from contaminated sediments.

- **Will all exposed seafood remain contaminated?**

Once exposure ceases, many marine animals can gradually eliminate the contaminants encountered in an oil spill. The rate of elimination can vary from days to months depending on the amount and type of oil exposure and the metabolism of the particular animals. The levels of contamination will be progressively monitored by authorities before, during and after exposure to assure seafood safety before allowing commercial and recreational harvest.

- **What are the typical contaminants found in seafood exposed to oil spills?**

A large variety of chemicals can be involved in an oil spill. The most common contaminants associated with seafood are collectively known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs.

These are more common because their water-soluble characteristics allow more exposure to aquatic animals. Interestingly, PAHs are found throughout our environment including our food supply, both raw and cooked. There have been no recorded illnesses due to PAH exposure at most levels encountered in our environment or other foods, but elevated levels will require controls to prevent excessive exposure.

There are no established limits for PAH exposure to assure food safety, but from prior experience with other oil spills, guidelines have been calculated for consideration. These guidelines account for both the amount and duration of exposure, and they vary by type of seafood. The guidelines are based on very sensitive analytical detection of contaminants at concentrations levels as low as parts per billion (ppb; one part contaminant per one billion parts of edible seafood). Federal and state authorities will use these guidelines to determine the safety level for seafood and the associated advice for harvest and consumption.

- **Where can I learn more about oil spills and seafood consumption?**

Florida Sea Grant Web Site

<http://flseagrant.org>

Sea Grant Extension Seafood Network Information Center

<http://seafood.ucdavis.edu/organize/oilspills.htm>

National Sea Grant Online Library

http://nsgl.gso.uri.edu/libraries/hazard_shipping.html

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