

# NorthwestNEWS

## Columbia River tribes face higher cancer risk

### Federal study cites pollutants found in fish

LYLE, Wash. (AP) — A study being released this week concludes that members of American Indian tribes whose diets include large amounts of Columbia River fish have a higher risk for cancer and other diseases.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study finds that

the risk for their children is even greater.

"You don't need to be a rocket scientist to look at this and say, 'Wow, the risk is really high,'" Anne Watanabe, an attorney for the Yakama Tribe, which participated in the study, said in a story published Wednesday in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Columbia River fish are loaded with an assortment of toxic pollutants that are threatening the health of some 20,000 American Indians, the EPA concludes.

A hazard level is calculated by comparing how much of a

chemical can be safely eaten with how much is actually being eaten. A hazard level of 1 is considered safe.

The tribes' fish-heavy diet elevated the hazard level to 8 for salmon and trout, but it soared to 100 for two resident fish: sturgeon and mountain whitefish. For children eating the largest amounts of fish, the hazard risk was nearly twice that high.

In recent years, state and federal agencies have issued warnings about toxic chemicals in fish, suggesting that women of childbearing age and children limit or stop

some consumption.

That strategy isn't likely to work with most Indians in the Columbia Basin.

"I was raised on fish," said James Kiona, who helps monitor the Yakamas' fish catch. "I never knew anything else."

The EPA's research into tribal health began in 1989 as a partnership with the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

Four tribes with reservations in Washington, Oregon and Idaho — the Yakamas, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Con-

federated Tribes of Warm Springs — were surveyed about their diet.

EPA and tribal researchers found that adults eat as many as 48 fish meals a month, and that the tribes as a whole eat fish at rates six to 11 times that of the national average.

"There needs to be some action," EPA environmental scientist Patricia Cirone said.

The fish were analyzed for 132 chemicals, including pesticides, metals and organic pollutants. Ninety-two pollutants were found. The most frequently detected contaminants were metals, PCBs, banned pesti-

cides such as DDT and chemicals produced during chlorine bleaching of paper pulp or water chlorination.

EPA scientists emphasize that the amount of fish sampled in the study was small and only two dozen fishing locations were tested.

Fish is a great source of protein, and its benefits must be weighed against potential risk of disease, Cirone said. The problem isn't the fish, but the chemicals that taint it.

"Let's get the rivers cleaned up," said Charles Hudson, spokesman for the Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.