

The Seattle Times

Testing finds no nuke-disaster radiation in Alaska seafood

Originally published November 30, 2015 at 3:44 pm

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The Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Alaska seafood has not been tainted by the Fukushima nuclear disaster four years ago, according to test results announced Monday by a state agency.

Alaska health authorities working with the federal Food and Drug Administration pronounced Alaska salmon, cod, halibut and other species free from radioactive contamination connected to the power plant damaged in Japan more than four years ago.

A 9.0 earthquake on March 11, 2011, generated a 130-foot wave that devastated 217 square miles in Japan. About 16,000 people were confirmed dead and nearly 2,600 were never found.

Among the damaged facilities was the nuclear plant complex at Fukushima, and meltdowns created fear that radionuclides, or radioactive isotopes, might drift east.

Debris from Japan, including boats and buoys, crossed the Pacific and arrived on Alaska's shore. The greater concern was the potential effect on the Alaska seafood industry, which in 2011 was valued at \$15.7 billion in direct and secondary economic output. The industry employed 63,100 workers in Alaska, making it the state's largest private sector employer.

Sampling has never detected radioactive contamination from Fukushima in Alaska, but that has not stopped the rumors. Misinformation spread online has caused much concern in the last four years, said Marlena Brewer, an environmental protection specialist for the Division of Environmental Health.

“I get calls from all across the country,” Brewer said. “I’ve even had international calls with concerns about Alaska seafood.”

Ocean modeling of the distribution of contaminants did not indicate a potential risk to Alaska fish, according to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

The department made arrangements with the FDA to sample and directly test fish. Testing this year at the FDA’s Winchester Engineering Analytical Center in Winchester, Massachusetts, as in 2014 found no detectable levies of contamination from Fukushima.

Samples were collected from four of five Alaska salmon species, including king, chum, sockeye and pink, which spend part of their lives in the western Pacific Ocean. Health officials also took samples from halibut, pollock, sablefish and Pacific cod.

Test results were in line with water-quality sampling done in 2014 by a nonprofit group, Cook Inletkeeper. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution has sampled along the West Coast since 2011 and found no levels of concern, Brewer said.

Scientists predicted concentrations of Fukushima radioactive isotopes in North Pacific waters could peak in 2015.