



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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December 15, 2014

The Honorable Kirk Pearson, Chair  
Senate Natural Resources and Parks Committee  
Post Office Box 40466  
Olympia, WA 98504-0466

Dear Senator Pearson,

The Washington State Department of Health (the department) provides a letter each year to the appropriate legislative policy and fiscal committees on the status of its recreational shellfish biotoxin account as required by law. This letter is intended to satisfy that requirement (RCW 77.32.555).

The Recreational Shellfish Biotoxin Monitoring Program is funded by a surcharge on recreational fishing and shellfishing licenses that the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) sells. The 2014 annual appropriation to the department was \$676,000. Of the total funds deposited, state law requires that \$150,000 be made available to the University of Washington (UW).

The dedicated biotoxin account (15M) had a beginning fiscal year 2014 fund balance of \$601,464. The WDFW deposited an additional \$757,207 of new revenue into the account. The department spent \$641,979 conducting the biotoxin program which includes monitoring and testing. The University of Washington spent \$171,629. The ending fund balance for the fiscal year was \$516,629.

The department historically carries a fund balance in the biotoxin account due to the fact that a majority of the shellfish license fee revenue is collected early in the summer just prior to the close of the fiscal year. However, annual expenditures from the biotoxin account exceeded annual revenues in fiscal year 2014. This is due in large part to an emergent biotoxin causing an increased need for biotoxin monitoring and testing.

In 2011, three illnesses in Washington were caused by a new biotoxin that causes Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP). These illnesses marked the first incidence of DSP in Washington and the United States, requiring us as the FDA designated Shellfish Authority to establish a new testing protocol and additional sampling for this emerging biotoxin. Our public health lab has limited the shellfish samples to be tested for DSP toxins due to increased analytical costs.

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning testing in Washington has shown this emerging biotoxin to be a real public health threat. The DSP data collected from 2012 and 2013 demonstrates the need for additional samples and testing. Without adequate funding for more complete biotoxin testing allowing us to more accurately characterize the presence and level of biotoxin, expanded and extended closures of shellfish growing areas may be necessary. This impacts both recreational harvests and the commercial shellfish industry. The department's priority is to ensure that collecting and harvesting shellfish remains a vibrant part of Washington's culture and economy.

We are currently working on a 2015 request to the legislature to increase the current surcharge fees on specific WDFW licenses to fund the monitoring needs for DSP and other emerging biotoxins. When marine waters warm, existing organisms can change their toxin production, leading to an increased risk to human health. We are beginning to track one such member of our marine environment, an algae species that produces the toxin that causes Azaspiracid Shellfish Poisoning (AZP). Currently, there is minimal testing for AZP.

Furthermore, we observe that toxin levels are lingering longer in the marine environment than previously, increasing the number of biotoxin tests needed to accurately assess conditions, adding to the cost of our biotoxin monitoring activity. At the current limited frequency of biotoxin testing and current funding level, the biotoxin account will be exhausted by 2015.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss in detail the needs these emerging biotoxins cause for the program and the health of shellfish consumers.

If you have questions about the recreational shellfish biotoxin account, please contact Amy Ferris, Acting Chief Financial Officer, at 360-236-4503.

Sincerely,



John Wiesman, DrPH, MPH  
Secretary of Health

cc: Members, Senate Natural Resources and Parks Committee  
Members, Senate Ways and Means Committee  
Members, House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
Members, House Appropriations Committee  
Amy Ferris, Department of Health