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For immediate release

Here's advice for fishing fans
heading for lake vacation spots

Dr. Robert McCauley, a biologist at Wilfrid Laurier University who conducts ongoing research into Great Lake fish, advises caution to fishermen heading for a spell at lakeside cottages.

"You can eat what you catch but use common sense in how much you consume," he said. "Moderation and diversity is a good rule to follow."

Dr. McCauley said there are varying amounts of toxic materials in fish in the Great Lakes but adds that fish are by no means the only food we eat to pose this hazard.

"Even so-called organic food, which most people regard as safe, can be adulterated with toxins in a number of ways, even from the fertilizer used."

The Laurier biologist said visitors to Port Elgin and Southampton, often called the Riviera of the Twin Cities, should feel safe in consuming rainbow trout up to 26 inches, white suckers up to 18 inches, and pike. Smallmouth bass are a question mark.

Size is an important factor, he explained, since the older a fish becomes the more toxins it has accumulated. And the length of a fish serves as a guide to age.

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The principal contaminant in Ontario game fish is mercury. In addition, traces of man-made compounds such as DDT, mirex and PCBs have also been detected.

"I'd feel quite safe in eating the occasional dinner of lake fish," he said, "but would vary my diet. A hermit who ate only lake fish could be in trouble."

Dr. McCauley said fishermen interested in getting the details on what fish are safe to eat should consult the Guide to Eating Ontario's Sport Fish, annual publications of the Ontario ministry of the environment.

The guides list safe levels for consuming game fish in the hundreds of lakes in the province and are available in many libraries.