

## Health officials advising no more than one smelt meal per month

By [Robb Coles](#) KBJR TV

*Published: May. 9, 2022 at 7:58 PM CDT*

DULUTH, MN. (KBJR) - For many people who live around Lake Superior, spring means the smelting season has begun.

“Smelting is one of those first things that you do when you get out of winter, that you do out in the outdoors,” said Cory Goldsworthy, Minnesota DNR’s Lake Superior Fisheries Supervisor.

According to Goldsworthy, with this year’s cold weather, that’s happening a little later.

“With the long winter and the cold spring that we’ve had we’re essentially a month behind everything that we do,” said Goldsworthy.

But a delayed start isn’t the only difference. A new concern has environmental and health leaders joining forces to get the word out.

“We wanted to inform people that fish consumption advisories had changed for rainbow smelt,” said Don Schreiner, a Fisheries Specialist for Minnesota Sea Grant.

According to Schreiner, a recent test discovered dangerous chemicals known as PFAS in Lake Superior smelt.

PFAS stands for Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

“PFAS is a chemical that comes into the water through a number of manufactures items that we use,” said Schreiner.

He said it’s found in non-stick pans and water repellents and can enter the watershed through runoff.

“There are issues because it can be cancer-causing of course, and obviously that gets everyone concerned,” said Schreiner.

In response, the Minnesota Department of Health is advising anglers to limit how much smelt they eat.

“Now it’s restricted to one meal per month,” Schreiner said.

Schreiner said this discovery is relatively new, and the health leaders are taking a cautious approach while continuing to test for the chemical.

“They want to be conservative on any sort of consumption when you have that sort of chemical in your food web I guess,” said Schreiner.

According to Goldsworthy, this advisory shouldn’t stop people from smelting, but it can help them do it safely.

“Go out, have fun, and inform yourself on the fish consumption advisory. Make the best decision that fits you,” said Goldsworthy.

Public health leaders in both Wisconsin and Michigan have issued similar smelt consumption advisories.

In Minnesota, State Senator Jen McEwen, a DFL’er who represents the Duluth area, has introduced legislation to help combat PFAS and their effect throughout the state.

She provided KBJR with the following statement.

“The MN Department of Health advises limiting consumption of Smelt again this season due to PFAS contamination. Per and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of toxic chemicals used to make water-repellent items from non-stick pans, food packaging, mascara, and stain-resistant rugs. PFAS are persistent - meaning they stay in our bodies. Chemicals like PFAS in our water threaten our public health, wildlife, our beloved Minnesota environment, and our economy. When we’re finding these forever chemicals in smelt, it’s a serious problem. We’re going to have to figure out how to remove these chemicals from our environment, but in the meantime, we should at least stop putting more of them out there.”