

President Obama recognizes Gulf of Mexico Seafood SAFE to eat. Enjoy it.

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■ By [Steven Hedlund](#), *SeafoodSource* editor

15 June, 2010 - President Obama on Monday reassured the public that Gulf of Mexico seafood is safe to eat, emphasizing that his administration is ramping up its efforts to protect the U.S. seafood supply.

“So, let me be clear: Seafood from the Gulf ... is safe to eat,” said Obama during a stop in Theodore, Ala. “But we need to make sure that it stays that way.”

Obama, who also visited Gulfport, Miss., said his administration, led by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, are taking a multi-pronged approach to protect the U.S. seafood supply, including precautionary fishing closures, increased seafood inspections and a reopening protocol.

“That’s why, beyond closing off waters that have been or are likely to be exposed to oil, the FDA and NOAA are increasing inspections of seafood processors, strengthening surveillance programs and monitoring fish that are caught just outside of restricted areas. And we’re also coordinating our efforts with the states, which are implementing similar plans,” said Obama.

“I had some of that seafood for lunch and it was delicious, he added. “But we want to make sure that the food industry down here as much as possible is getting the ... the protection and the certification that they need to continue their businesses. So this is important for consumers who need to know that their food is safe, but it’s also important for the fishermen and processors, who need to be able to sell their products with confidence.”

So far, NOAA and contracted fishing vessels have conducted 18 sampling missions in areas inside and outside the closed area, and 640 seafood samples are currently being tested for oil contamination — 118 samples at the National Seafood Inspection Laboratory in Pascagoula, Miss., and 416 samples at NOAA’s Seattle laboratory.

The FDA has also set up a hotline, 1-888-INFO-FDA, for fishermen and consumers to report seafood safety issues.

“FDA and NOAA are working together to ensure that seafood from the Gulf is not contaminated with oil,” said FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg. “It is important to coordinate seafood surveillance efforts on the water, at the docks and at seafood processors to ensure seafood in the market is safe to eat.”

Additionally, the FDA issued [a letter](#) on Monday reiterating that seafood processors are required to implement a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan when one or more food-safety hazards are reasonably likely to occur.

“Environmental chemical contaminants, such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) from crude oil, in fish and shellfish pose a potential human health hazard. These contaminants may accumulate in fish and shellfish at levels that can cause illness,” said Michael Landa, acting director of the FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, in the letter.