

FEELING CRABBY

By

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An official warning has been given about eating Dungeness and Rock crab fished out of the Pacific Coast between the Santa Barbara and Oregon borders. A marine alga called pseudo-nitzschia has contaminated the crustaceans with the neurotoxin domoic acid. They ingest the algae until its toxins reaches a level that is poisonous to humans, marine animals, and sea birds when consumed.

No one knows what causes pseudo-nitzschia so authorities are not certain of when crabs will be safe to eat again. Commercial crab fishing season was set to begin in mid November, but with the news of the neurotoxin being present, this season's future appears to be in jeopardy.

When ingested by humans, domoic acid can cause symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, headache and dizziness. Usually symptoms will fade within a few days. But extreme cases of domoic acid poisoning can result in a permanent short-term memory loss condition known as amnesiac shellfish poisoning. Other symptoms include confusion, seizures, short-ness of breath, coma, and death.

Raphael Kudela of the University of California Santa Cruz led a team of researchers that had been watching the toxic algae level in the Pacific Ocean rise to alarming domoic acid levels since May of this year, and he refers to it as, "a pretty massive bloom... one of the most toxic and spatially largest events we've had in at least a decade."

The toxins accumulate in shellfish, and small fish like anchovies and sardines that feed on the algae, while poisoning humans, marine animals and birds that feed on them.

In April of 2007, an article in the New York Times reported that domoic acid toxin levels in plankton found along the Los Angeles coast to be twice the levels previously recorded. According to researcher biologists at the University of Southern California.

One hundred and twenty sea lions were taken in between March and June of 2007 with about seventy of those suspected of having domoic acid poisoning. Thirty five percent of those that were poisoned died. A reported 50 dolphins, a minke whale, and sea birds have also been killed due to poisoning around that time.