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WHATCOM COUNTY PSP BIOTOXIN CLOSURE PARTIALLY LIFTED

BELLINGHAM—Paralytic shellfish poison (PSP) levels have dropped in some areas of Whatcom County. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health has partially lifted the recreational harvest closure for beaches from Point Whitehorn south to the Whatcom/Skagit County border. All Whatcom County beaches are now closed to the harvest of varnish clams only. The Whatcom County Health Department will continue to monitor PSP biotoxin levels and will notify the public of any changes in beach closure status.

PSP biotoxins are found in certain types of naturally occurring algae. Molluscan shellfish are filter feeders and they consume algae as a food source. Biotoxins from toxic algae can accumulate in the flesh of molluscan shellfish, making the shellfish unsafe to eat. Common types of molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops. Molluscan shellfish that are sold in stores are tested before they are shipped to retailers and are safe to eat.

PSP intoxication can be life-threatening. Symptoms of PSP intoxication may appear within minutes or hours. PSP symptoms usually begin with tingling lips and tongue and may be followed by difficulty breathing, and potentially death. If you experience these symptoms seek immediate medical attention. For extreme reactions call 911.

Crab meat is not affected by PSP, but “crab butter” and crab entrails can harbor biotoxin and should be discarded. PSP biotoxins are naturally occurring and are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Algae that contain PSP biotoxins cannot be seen, and must be detected using laboratory testing. Therefore, recreational shellfish harvesters should check the DOH website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm> or call the DOH Biotoxin **Hotline** at **1-800-562-5632** before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington State. **### END ###**