



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
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## P R E S S R E L E A S E

### **DEP ADVISORY CONCERNING WINTER FISH KILLS**

#### *Shallow lakes and ponds most susceptible to fish kills caused by extensive snow and ice cover*

Winter is finally beginning to lose its grip on Connecticut. This winter was severe, and the extensive snow and ice cover experienced throughout the state has greatly increased the potential for fish kills in shallow ponds and lakes. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has already received several reports of fish kills and as the ice cover on lakes and ponds recedes this year, DEP expects to receive more reports.

Winterkill is a natural event that varies from year to year depending on conditions. “Winterkills occur most frequently in very shallow, nutrient-enriched ponds that are subject to abundant growth of aquatic weeds,” said Peter Aarrestad, Director of DEP’s Inland Fisheries Division. “Conditions conducive to winterkill arise when heavy snow cover over ice inhibits sunlight penetration, thereby preventing aquatic plants from producing oxygen via photosynthesis. This process is the sole means of oxygen creation under ice-covered ponds. The greater the load of dead and decaying plant material, the more rapid the loss of oxygen and the more quickly fish can be stressed or killed by low dissolved oxygen levels. The fish typically die during the winter and are only observed following ice-out.”

Winter kills that occur in larger lakes are rarely serious in the long run because lakes support thousands of fish per acre. Usually enough fish survive, either in the lake or in connecting waters, to repopulate the lake. More severe winterkills that result in the elimination of all or nearly all of the pond’s fish community are more likely to occur in very small, privately owned ponds. Pond owners who may experience winterkill are advised that in the future, shoveling off some of the snow cover to allow light penetration may stave off potential winterkill conditions.

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Anyone observing abnormally high fish mortalities during or after ice out this spring can notify the DEP Inland Fisheries Division at the Headquarters in Hartford (860-424-3474), the Eastern District Office in Marlborough (860-295-9523) or the Western District office in Harwinton (860-485-0226).

The public is also advised that any fish kills observed in rivers, lakes, ponds, and streams any time of year can be reported to the Inland Fisheries Division at the numbers listed above. Biologists will discuss the caller's observations and determine if a field investigation is warranted. While most fish kills are natural occurrences, some have been attributed to accidental or unauthorized human actions such as chemical releases, farm runoff, flow modifications or poorly designed or conducted management activities. Anyone reporting fish kills is asked to provide as much detail as possible concerning location, time and date, estimated size, numbers and types of fish involved, and other relevant site-specific information, and if possible, photographs or digital images.

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