



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

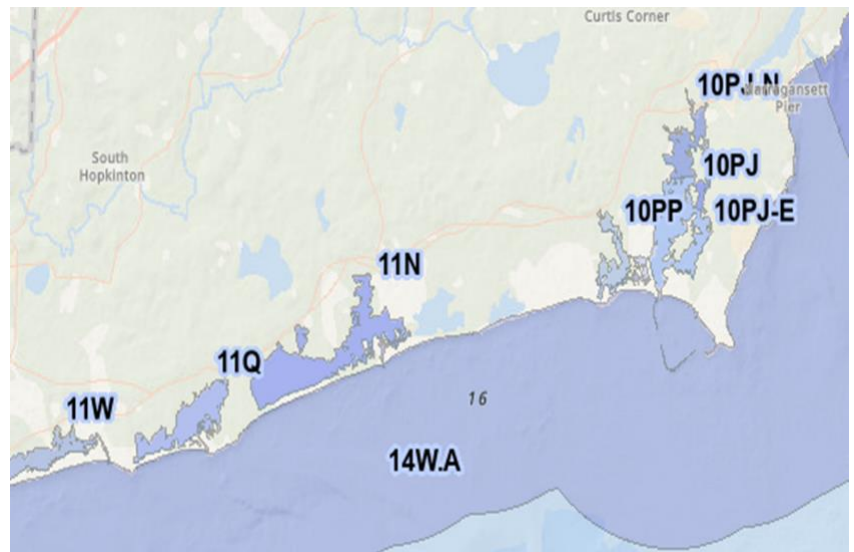
Thursday, May 16, 2024

HEAVY RAIN FORCES PRECAUTIONARY SHELLFISH CLOSURE OF HARVESTING AREAS IN SOUTH COUNTY SALT PONDS

PROVIDENCE, RI – The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is announcing that several shellfish areas along the south coast of Rhode Island have been closed due to inundating rainfall received in the Washington County area last night.

The following areas are currently closed to shellfish harvest and are scheduled to reopen to shellfishing at 12 PM on Thursday, May 23:

- Pt. Judith Pond (10PJ, 10 PJ-N, and 10PJ-E)
- Potter Pond (10PP)
- Ninigret Pond (11N)
- Quonochontaug Pond (11Q)
- Winnapaug Pond (11W)



The heavy rain on Wednesday night dropped over four inches of rain in a 12-hour period in Washington County. Rainfall as of 8 AM today totaled 3.7" at Westerly Airport with higher localized totals in the Wakefield area. Previous monitoring has indicated that bacteria levels exceed safe shellfishing standards in the salt ponds following rainfall of more than 3" in a 24-hour period. Therefore, a closure of these shellfish areas is in place to safeguard public health following the extreme rainfall.

Stormwater flow after excess rain runoff can convey bacterial contaminants to RI's coastal salt ponds, prompting the shellfish closure. Previous water quality observations indicate that the bacteria levels in the salt ponds will return to normal, safe background levels within the above-mentioned seven-day closure period.

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DEM, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), and the RI Coastal Resources Management Council, along with industry partners, collaborate to ensure that shellfish grown and harvested from Rhode Island waters continues to be a quality safe seafood product to be enjoyed by all consumers. This is achieved by diligent monitoring of shellfish harvesting waters to protect public health. This monitoring enables a quick response when conditions indicate a change in water quality due to natural events such as algae blooms or unusual weather events.

For more information on the shellfish harvesting classifications, review the annual notice available at [RIDEM - Shellfish](#). An [interactive shellfishing map](#) is also available.

For information on emergency and conditional area water quality related shellfish closures, call DEM's 24-hour shell fishing hotline at 401-222-2900, visit www.dem.ri.gov/shellfish, or sign up for the Office of Water Resources' listserv here: RishellfishOWR-subscribe@listserve.ri.gov.

For more information on DEM programs and initiatives, visit www.dem.ri.gov. Follow [DEM on Facebook](#), Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM), or Instagram (@rhodeisland.dem) for timely updates.

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