

Stores braced for salmon boycott

by ED HARRIS and MARK PRIGG, Evening Standard

Supermarkets and shops are braced for a boycott today after a damning report claimed eating farmed salmon can cause cancer.

Government scientists are desperately trying to calm consumer panic after researchers warned that Scottish farmed salmon is so contaminated with toxic chemicals that it should be eaten no more than three times a year.

The largest ever study of pollutants in salmon found chemicals linked to cancer and birth defects in fish from supermarkets and wholesalers. Environmentalists called for an immediate inquiry, but the Food Standards Agency today urged people to keep eating salmon.

Chairman Sir John Krebs said: "People should consume at least two portions of fish a week - one of which should be oily, like salmon. There is good evidence that eating oily fish reduces the risk of death from recurrent heart attacks and that there is a similar effect in relation to first heart attacks."

Scottish Quality Salmon, which represents farmers, claimed the study was "seriously misleading" and ignored all the health benefits reported in "more than 5,000 scientific studies".

The findings, published today in the respected US journal Science, could have a devastating effect on the £700-million-a-year Scottish industry, which supports some 6,500 jobs.

Scientists found levels of 14 toxins were significantly higher in European and North American farm-raised salmon than in fish caught in the wild.

The pollutants, all in a category called organochlorines, included chemicals which persist in the environment and are potential cancer triggers. Four of the most hazardous - including PCBs and dioxins - were used to calculate consumption safety guidelines.

The most contaminated fish came from farms in Scotland and the Faroes. For these, the safe monthly limit was a mere quarter of a serving. Wild salmon, on the other hand, could be consumed at levels as high as eight meals per month.

The scientists, from six research centres in the US and Canada, tracked the pollutants down to the fish meal fed to intensively farmed salmon.

Toxin levels in the "fish chow", a mix of ground-up fish and oil, were similar to those in the salmon themselves.

Professor Ronald Hites, from Indiana State University, who led the study, said: "It's important for people who eat salmon to know that farmed salmon have higher levels of toxins than wild salmon from the open ocean."

A Safeway spokesman said dioxins were well below the limits set by the EU.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-205568/Stores-braced-salmon-boycott.html#ixzz1svXOC6GH>