

Reports

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1985 MSX Update

Virginia Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program

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VIMS

Marine Resource Advisory

1985 MSX Update

Scientists at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) regularly monitor oysters in Chesapeake Bay tributaries for MSX and Dermo disease prevalence. Because drought and high salinities in 1985 signal a possibility for the spread of MSX, VIMS scientists are carefully watching the situation. When environmental conditions warrant or disease outbreaks occur, the Institute alerts oyster growers to potential dangers.

Two factors have raised concerns over the possibility of disease problems in oyster-growing areas. The first is the higher-than-normal spring 1985 salinities in our rivers, coupled with a dry summer and fall in 1984. MSX has a history of moving upriver during prolonged dry periods such as occurred in 1963-67 and 1981-82. VIMS surveys of the James and Rappahannock Rivers during April 1985, a time when MSX expulsion could occur if salinities dropped low enough (approximately 10 parts per thousand), revealed much higher salinities than normal in both rivers (Table 1).

The second factor which alerted VIMS scientists was our routine disease monitoring program. Each year oysters from the James River are taken and held in trays in the York River at Gloucester Point. These oysters are regularly examined for evidence of disease. A sample of

Wreck Shoal oysters transplanted to Gloucester Point August 17, 1984, exhibited 44% infection of MSX on April 30, 1985. A second sample of oysters from Horsehead held at Gloucester Point had a 64% prevalence of MSX on May 14, 1985. As a result of these tests, VIMS obtained additional samples of oysters from Wreck Shoal, Chuckatuck River (James River seed), Rappahannock River (Cedar Island, Parrots Island and Balls Point), and Great Wicomico River (Fleet Point and Haynies Bar) during May 1985. Fortunately, all these samples tested negative for disease.

This does not mean all is well. There still exists the possibility of MSX infection during summer 1985. MSX has demonstrated an ability to move tens of miles up the Bay in one year. For this reason, VIMS will continue to inspect closely our oysters held at Gloucester Point and in other selected locations. In late summer additional samples will be taken from oyster grounds around the Bay and analyzed for MSX presence.

Further advisories will be issued to the oyster industry as more information becomes available. For additional information contact Sea Grant Marine Advisory Services, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Gloucester Point, VA 23062.

Table 1. Salinities in Rappahannock and James Rivers, April 1985

<u>Rappahannock River, 18 April 1985</u>		<u>Salinities in Parts Per Thousand</u>	
Miles from Mouth	Location	Surface	Bottom
0	Mouth	16.1	16.2
16.1	Off Carters Creek	15.0	16.1
28.0	Off Balls Point	14.4	15.8

<u>James River, 24 April 1985</u>		<u>Salinities in Parts Per Thousand</u>	
Miles from Mouth	Location	Surface	Bottom
0	Mouth	22.3	29.8
17.30	James River Bridge	18.5	21.5
31.85	Wreck Shoal	12.3	18.1



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