



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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## **VMRC Receives Top Marks from FDA for Shellfish Safety and Consumer Protection**

*~ Audit praises agency efforts and Virginia Marine Police enforcement~*

NEWPORT NEWS, VA. – The Virginia Marine Resources Commission is doing an excellent job of protecting consumers from the potential dangers of tainted oysters, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said in a glowing audit received by the VMRC today.

The audit also singled out VMRC's law enforcement division, Virginia Marine Police, for extensive and effective enforcement of shellfish harvesting regulations, which ensures that shellfish are not mistakenly harvested from polluted waterways to endanger consumers.

"The VMRC was found to be providing the necessary patrol of shellfish growing/harvest waters to prevent the illegal harvest of shellfish within the State of Virginia ... The FDA would like to take this opportunity to commend your agency and staff for developing and implementing a program of icing for rapid temperature reduction of oysters during warm weather months on-board harvest vessels during the harvest days," regional FDA director Melinda K. Plaisier said in a letter to VMRC Commissioner Steven G. Bowman.

The Virginia Marine Police have a long history of receiving high marks for the effective enforcement of Virginia's shellfish harvesting laws, but this latest audit is notable for its praise.

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“This is a remarkable audit, and I’m grateful the FDA has recognized our efforts to protect consumers and the excellent reputation of the Virginia seafood industry from the dangers of tainted oysters,” said Commissioner Bowman. “Our oysters are clean, safe and delicious.”

The audit noted that no consumer has been harmed by eating a tainted oyster traced to Virginia since 1995.

The FDA audit attributed that fact to the Marine Police’s extensive efforts, noting that from July 1, 2009 to Oct. 31, 2011, the Marine Police spent 16,328 hours conducting 94,842 inspections on polluted shellfish growing areas. Officers issued eight summonses and obtained eight convictions during that time. Officers also spent an additional 4,591 hours conducting 14,458 inspections on general shellfish enforcement. They issued 76 violations during those inspections and obtained 57 convictions.

“Virginia’s oysters are excellent. We work hard to make sure the best, safest product goes to market,” said Doug Domenech, Virginia’s Secretary of Natural Resources.

After a week of personally observing Virginia Marine Police shellfish harvesting patrols and inspections, a FDA auditor determined the Officers to be properly equipped, trained, diligent and dedicated.

“I am pleased to report that the Virginia Shellfish Program was found to be operating in conformance with the (National Shellfish Sanitation Program) requirements by a dedicated staff of professionals that have a high level of experience and expertise in their field of public health relating to shellfish sanitation and safety,” regional FDA director Plaisier said.

The audit covered the period of October 2010 through September 2011, and can be found on VMRC’s website [www.mrc.virginia.gov](http://www.mrc.virginia.gov)