CONTACT: **Holly Brown-Williams**
Health Research for Action
(510) 643-4543

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contamination Threatens Health, Environment and Economy

New article says action needed to address growing problem of fish contamination

BERKELEY, CA, August 27, 2008 … Shoppers may be getting a lot more than they bargain for when they add fish to their grocery carts. According to the feature article in the latest issue of UC Berkeley's Health Research for Action *Perspectives*, public health officials are struggling with the dilemma between promoting consumption of high-protein fish and safeguarding the public from the growing risk of seafood contamination.

"Fish contamination is a major public health and environmental issue that has yet to be resolved," said Holly Brown-Williams, one of the article's authors. "A lot of attention has been paid to improving coastal and marine environments, while inland waterways suffering from rampant pollution have fallen through the cracks of multiple regulatory frameworks."

The article, *Fish Contamination: Environment and Health at Risk,* points out that fish contamination is widespread, affecting virtually all water bodies. The consequences affect not only public health and fish populations, but also negatively affect local economies. In California, for instance, recreational and commercial fishing industries contribute over $5.5 billion annually to the economy, while Washington's Puget Sound region drives over $20 billion each year in economic activities associated with fishing, boating, other recreation, tourism, and trade associated with ports.

Those hardest hit by fish contamination are populations that rely on fish as a mainstay of their diet, according to the *Perspectives* article. Fishing is an important economical and cultural activity in some ethnic communities, such as for Cambodians living in Stockton, California. The area's Cambodian community looks for identity and nourishment in the waters of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, but the Central Valley's history of mining, agriculture,

industry and huge water-diversion projects has made eating their "catch of the day" a risky endeavor. But everyone who eats fish is potentially at risk.

"Water pollution and fish contamination remain significant problems and pose disproportionate risks to some populations. State policymakers need to make fish contamination a priority to ensure comprehensive monitoring, increase public awareness, and develop effective pollution prevention and cleanup strategies. Ultimately, coordinated action among federal, state and regional programs will be needed to address these problems regionally and nationally," said Brown-Williams. The article recommends a range of actions to address the problems.

Health Research for Action (HRA) publishes the *Perspectives* series to address critical health policy issues and provide thoughtful recommendations. The August 2008 issue is available on the HRA Web site at: http://healthresearchforaction.org/policy/perspectives.html

Health Research for Action is a center in UC Berkeley's School of Public Health. It draws on the power and resources of the University and partnerships with communities to conduct research and translate findings into innovative policies, resources and programs. HRA's approach changes lives by reducing health disparities and supporting healthier communities. Visit the center at www.healthresearchforaction.org.

-0-