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## Sustainable fishing at your fingertips: The best fish to buy? Ask your cell phone

New mobile services provide instant access to the healthiest, greenest catch

By [Katherine Harmon](#)



**Fishing for an answer:** New mobile services can tell you whether you're picking a fish that's going to be good for you and the planet.  
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Ah, the familiar grocery store guessing game: Which fish is the right one to buy? Farm raised or wild? Pacific or Atlantic? Yellowfin or albacore tuna? Is that swordfish laden with mercury? And what about the shark?

It's close to impossible to remember all the factors that go into [making fish healthy and eco-friendly](#)—or not—especially during a rushed trip to the supermarket or a business meeting over sushi. And although any given choice might seem insignificant, all those everyday purchases may have a big impact on the oceans in the long run, says Ken Peterson, spokesperson for the Monterey Bay Aquarium in California.

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Relax. Help is only as far away as the cell phone in your hand, thanks to three environmental dot-orgs that have set up services consumers can link to 24/7 to instantly get all the fishy facts.

The folks at [Blue Ocean Institute](#), an East Norwich, N.Y.-based nonprofit that studies and promotes the world's oceans, have created [FishPhone](#), which uses a color scale to rate fish from green to red (green being the ecofriendlyest). It also red flags varieties known to contain high levels of [mercury](#), a metal associated with [neurological problems](#) and birth defects, as well as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), organic compounds that are assumed carcinogens and have also been linked to reproductive problems.

To use FishPhone: simply send a text message that says FISH and the variety you're considering to 30644; you'll receive an instant text reply on whether your choice is healthy for you, not to mention for the planet. (Users with [Internet](#) access on their mobiles may opt instead to search [fishphone.org](#).)

For instance, when asked about swordfish, the service texts back within seconds: "Atlantic and Mediterranean caught (GREEN), very few environmental concerns; Pacific caught (YELLOW) some environmental concerns. HEALTH ADVISORY: High Mercury."

Elaine Iandoli, a Blue Ocean spokesperson, says that FishPhone has received some 45,000 queries from more than 15,000 users since it was launched in fall 2007. She says it includes [rankings of some 100 edible sea creatures](#) that are updated twice a year and comprise different wild-caught and farm-raised fish. For wild fish, scientists take into account how a fish is caught (using nets, polls or harpoons, for example); whether the stock is being managed responsibly; how abundant the breed is (compared with historic levels); and whether fishing methods endanger other species (such as nets used to fish for yellowfin tuna that snare and kill dolphins). For [farmed fish](#), they factor in what the fish are fed, if the farms are big polluters, and the risk of the farmed species wreaking havoc on local ecosystems if they escape.

The fish most asked about, says Iandoli: salmon. (Just FYI—and to save the texting fee—the healthiest and most ecofriendly dish is wild-caught Alaskan).

"I think it's a great educational tool, which is just what a lot of consumers need right now," says Katharine Burnham, media director of the New York City-based Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), which offers a similar online service called [Seafood Selector](#) on its Web site and [for mobile devices](#). "A lot of consumers are becoming better educated about where their food comes from."

EDF has partnered with the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which also offers an online and mobile service called [Seafood Watch](#), to provide an [online sushi guide](#) that takes into account the health of both humans and the ocean.

The aquarium also recently launched [an application for the iPhone](#) that allows users to check out the eco-worthiness of their selections.

"People's choices make a huge difference in the [water](#)," Monterey's Peterson says. Not to mention on their own health. So now you can have your fish—and eat it, too.

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