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Impact of PCB Order On Fishing Seen Small

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State health officials say the government's order lowering the level of PCBs allowed in food because of cancer risks should not have a significant impact on their areas.

Dr. George Michaels, director of the Food and Drug Division for the Massachusetts Health Department, said he didn't think Thursday's ruling by the Food and Drug Administration will have much effect on commercial fishing.

"The only appreciable effect will probably be on recreational fishing," Mr. Michaels said.

Public health officials in Michigan said the order will not affect the state's longstand advisory against eating fish contaminated with PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — a widely used group of industrial compounds found in pesticides.

Bill Carlson, owner of Carlson Fisheries in Leland, Mich., said most of the commercial fishing in his state is done in Northern Lake Michigan and Lake Superior and most fish taken from those lakes exhibit low levels of PCB contamination.

But he said fish in smaller lakes around the state, particularly those caught in lakes near the larger metropolitan areas, carry higher levels of PCB contamination.

Industry to Appeal

Mr. Carlson said the industry will appeal the FDA decision to get the levels lowered more gradually.

The FDA ordered, effective Aug. 28, that fish, poultry or dairy products sold in interstate commerce must have lower levels of PCBs than presently allowed.

Currently five parts per million of PCBs are permitted in fish and shellfish. The new level will be 2 ppm. The tolerance for milk and dairy products will be cut from 2.5 ppm to 1.5 ppm, in poultry from 5 ppm to 3 ppm, and in eggs from 0.5 ppm to 0.3 ppm.

The FDA also asked the governors of 11 Northern and Midwestern states to warn consumers, especially pregnant and nursing women, not to eat privately caught fish with high levels of PCBs.

The agency said it thinks "there could be a loss of about $6million worth of fish a year" that will be banned from sale because they will contain higher levels of PCBs than the new rules allow.

The Environmental Defense Fund, which sued FDA last January to force stricter rules for PCBs in food, said recent evidence "shows that PCBs cause cancer, reproductive failure and other harmful effects in animals, as well as a range of adverse health effects in humans such as skin disease, nervous disorders and stillbirths.

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