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Scott sues to force Waukegan firm to clear harbor of PCB

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By Casey Bukro
Environment editor

THE ILLINOIS attorney general's office Thursday filed suit asking a federal court to force Outboard Marine Corp. to clean Waukegan harbor of a poisonous chemical discharged from the firm's plant from the early 1930s until 1972.

The chemical—polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB)—has been tainting Lake Michigan fish.

"People have a basic right to eat uncontaminated food," said Illinois Atty. Gen. William Scott, in announcing the suit had been filed by his office. Years of hydraulic flush discharges from the Outboard Marine plant have created heavy PCB concentrations in the Waukegan harbor and the company's North ditch leading into Lake Michigan.

"It's one of the largest concentrations of PCB on Lake Michigan," said Scott.

THE SUIT asks Outboard Marine to finance and conduct a study on how best to remove PCB from sediments in Waukegan harbor. Scott charges that PCB makes up to 25 per cent of the sediments.

"We're trying to be sure the PCB is removed in a way that will not adversely affect the environment of the lake," Scott said. He moved earlier to block plans to dredge the harbor, which could release PCB into Lake Michigan.

"The PCB came from Outdoor Marine and they should be forced to take a key role in getting rid of it," said Scott. The attorney general also charged that PCB continues to be washed into the lake by rain running off Outboard Marine property.

SCOTT IS SEEKING civil penalties of $10,000 for each pollution violation, plus $1,000 for each day it continues.

In March, Outboard Marine filed suit in federal court charging the federal and state environmental protection agencies with part of the responsibility for the PCB discharges. The company said it has spent $3 million to halt the discharges.

Scott is asking Outboard Marine to complete the clean-up study in three months. He pointed out that Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin have spent millions to stock Lake Michigan with game fish, "and now we have to warn people that the fish are contaminated with PCB." The states warn against eating more than one meal a week of Lake Michigan fish.

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