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ST. PAUL, MINN.
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Fish PCB level lower, disputed study discloses

RED WING (AP)—Recent tests by a private agency show PCB levels well within federal limits in fish taken from Lake Pepin, but authorities say further testing must be done before conclusions can be drawn.

The toxic PCBs—polychlorinated biphenyls—were found last month in fish taken from Lake Pepin. The fish contained quantities of the industrial chemical exceeding the federal standard, five parts per million, resulting in a federal ban on the interstate sale of Lake Pepin fish.

The chemicals are believed to cause birth defects and reproductive failure in fish, birds and mammals. They also are suspected of causing cancer among human beings.

Lake Pepin fishermen say they had a test made recently by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF), Madison. The tests reportedly showed PCB levels in nine fish taken from a typical seining area in the lake to be below one part per million.

Darryl Brown, chief of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration laboratory in Minneapolis, says the data is not conclusive. He suggested the fish taken for the WARF testing were different in size from those tested previously.

Brown said he has "full confidence" in the WARF laboratory and the procedures it used in testing the latest sample. But he noted that differences in size could account for a difference in PCB readings.

Scientists have theorized that PCB has more chance to accumulate in an older, larger fish which has more fatty tissue in which the chemical can lodge.

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