

Monsanto official calls proposed ban on firm's chemical unwise

A Monsanto Co. official has called unwise and unfounded a proposed national ban on the use of a chemical that is produced solely by the St. Louis firm.

The Michigan Natural Resources Commission voted last Friday to urge the Michigan legislature and the nation to ban use and production of the chemical, which is contaminating fish in Lake Michigan.

The chemical, polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), is used in a variety of household products.

"We hope this state will lead the nation in banning PCB," the commission said in a statement.

FISH IN Lake Michigan

have PCB levels above the limits allowed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, officials said.

The FDA has seized some shipments of chubb caught in Lake Michigan because PCB levels were found to be up to 20 parts per million. The FDA legal level is 5 parts per million. Human health could be endangered at a level of 500 parts per million, the FDA said.

PCB appears in a wide range of products, from paper to hand soap.

William B. Papageorge, product acceptability manager for Monsanto's industrial chemicals division, said such a ban would be unwise and unfounded.

"IT'S HARD to imagine how the application (of PCB) today could be the cause of the problem in Lake Michigan," he said, "and if all the states were to ban PCB, the problem in Lake Michigan would continue."

Papageorge said the company stopped selling the chemical for use in 1970 and 1972. Since the 1930s, he added, the chemical had been used in household products such as paint and ink.

Since 1972, however, the chemical has been sold only for uses such as insulation in transformers and fluorescent light bulbs. The purpose of the chemical, he said, is to prevent fires.