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The Environmental Protection Agency is stepping up its efforts to investigate and recommend controls for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), in the wake of "new evidence" that the chemicals may be more toxic and prevalent than previously thought.

The decision follows a series of recent actions by state and Federal agencies, including the seizure of thousands of pounds of Great Lakes fish by the Food and Drug Administration, and a warning against eating Hudson River fish by New York State conservation officials.

"A continuing widespread accumulation of PCBs in water, sediment and fish appears to be occurring," EPA analysts warn in a study to be presented later this month. "A significant proportion of the nation's waters are now affected and will continue to be," they add.

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