Pepin's 'cancer agents' hunted

By TERRY WOLKERSTORFER
Minneapolis Star Staff Writer

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) will begin work immediately on a survey to determine the origin of a cancer-causing chemical found in Lake Pepin carp, a PCA official said yesterday.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration ordered 20,000 pounds of carp fillets buried last week after they were found to contain concentrations of six to 14 parts per million of polychlorinated biphenyls —commonly called PCBs.

The federal guideline for PCBs in food for human consumption is five parts per million.

BARRY SCHADE, acting director of the PCA's water quality division, said that until the last six months, water samples taken from the Mississippi River had not shown detectable quantities of PCBs for 12 to 18 months.

Some recent samples have shown detectable quantities in excess of 50 parts per million, Schade said.

"We just don't have enough data on which to base a judgment about where it's coming from, so we're starting a survey of possible point sources as well as river water," Schade said.

He estimated it would be at least three months before the study is completed.

One of several theories being advanced, Schade said, is that the chemicals were not dumped into the river recently, but rather may have lain inert on the river bottom for several years. Dredging or barge traffic might have stirred up the chemicals, which then were ingested by the fish, according to the theory.

A VARIANT of the theory is that carp, which are bottom feeders, have eaten river-bottom plants which had absorbed PCBs over a period of years.

Although use of the chemical has declined drastically since warnings were issued in 1972, a Department of Natural Resources official said, it takes five years for the chemical to begin to break down.

Wisconsin officials said sample fish taken from Lake Pepin in 1970 averaged 24 parts PCBs per million, with one walleye pike showing a concentration of 33 parts per million. By 1973, the average was down to 9.7 parts per million — roughly the level found in the carp fillets.

The presence of PCBs in the river has been a cause of concern to a number of environmental groups, but the Food and Drug Administration says a person would have to eat carp with a high PCB concentration for about three years before high PCB levels might be measured in his body.

THE MINNEAPOLIS STAR
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.
D. 253,491

MAY 15 1975

MONS 031280