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Science unable to remove PCBs from state rivers, Mooney says

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By MONTE LORELL
United Press International

FRANKFORT — Natural Resources Secretary Eugene Mooney today said there is no available technology which can reduce the level of toxic PCBs in Kentucky streams and maintain a level harmless to humans.

However, Mooney told reporters at a morning briefing that samples taken in January and still in effect reveal there has been no contamination of drinking water supplies in the Commonwealth.

Mooney called the press gathering to allay fears that PCB levels in at least four sites in Western Kentucky are "significant," according to federal Environmental Protection Agency calculations.

The EPA considers PCB levels of three parts per million to be "significant," a level which concentrated could cause liver disease, skin rashes and birth defects in humans and cancer in laboratory animals.

Of the four Western Kentucky sites, one at northern Bullitt County's Valley of the Drums registered between one and 14 parts per million. Samples taken at other sites ranged from 0.01 to three parts per million.

Mooney said the higher levels of PCBs discovered are imbedded in sediment and will be dealt with once the extent of the spread is determined. Other sites were identified as Wilson Creek, Pond Creek and Stump Gap Creek.

He said a major priority in identifying and cleaning up the PCBs is preventing them from entering the food chain as was recently discovered in South Carolina. He added PCB levels rise as they move upward in the food chain.

Mooney cautioned fishermen not to eat fish caught in any of the sites which contain high, but not significant levels of the toxic chemical.

Mooney said PCBs can generally be disposed of by conventional means, but any liquid PCBs, still not found, must be incinerated. However, there are no existing facilities which can incinerate liquid PCBs.

The EPA banned the discharge of PCBs into rivers and streams in February, 1978. Since then, Monsanto Chemical Corp., the sole manufacturer of PCBs, has halted production.

Mooney also disclosed that a two-week inventory of the Valley of the Drums site has been completed and that 16,383 drums — about one-third of which contain potentially hazardous wastes — have been recovered.

According to Mooney, 5,221 drums containing either solid, sludge or liquids have been recovered.