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Cleaning, cooking can reduce PCBs

Anglers concerned about high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in Lake Michigan salmon and lake trout can rid the fish of much of the chemical by proper cleaning and cooking.

The best thing to do is clean the fish immediately after it is in the boat. The entrails, fatty layers and kidneys should be removed and the fatty belly flap trimmed off.

Others claim the best method to insure the least amount of PCBs remains is to fillet the fish. The method removes the best eating portion of the fish and leaves the impregnated portions. Don't throw the offal overboard. It's illegal.

Broiling and barbecuing the fillets or steaks, after thorough cleaning, are considered the best methods of cooking to remove the fatty oils that contain PCBs.

High levels of PCBs in Lake Michigan fish prompted the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to urge the state legislature to ban the use of PCBs in the state.

Analysis by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Ann Arbor laboratory indicated that the PCB level in lake trout went from 12.5 parts per million in 1972 to 19 ppm in 1973 and to 23 ppm in 1984.

PCBs are a group of compounds used in a number of industrial processes, including fire-resistant hydraulic fluids, heat transfer fluids, insulation in electrical transformers and capacitors, as plasticizers, and for speciality inks for certain paper printing processes.

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