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Toxic chemical nationwide ban is goal of PCA

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A nationwide ban on the sale and use of highly toxic industrial chemicals called PCBs was unanimously urged Tuesday by the board of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA).

The PCA's resolution will be sent to the Minnesota congressional delegation and leaders of key House and Senate environmental and consumer committees.

By its motion, the PCA board in effect agreed with scientists from four other Midwestern states and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that the PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — should not be used or sold in the country because of the known effects on fish, birds and some mammals and suspected effects on humans.

PCBs have a variety of industrial applications; in the manufacture of electrical insulators, heat transfer agents and hydraulic fluids, and also are used in some hand soaps.

The substances, which can cause birth defects and reproductive failure in birds and fish, have been found in excessive amounts in carp taken from Lake Pepin and other commercial and game fish in Lake Michigan and Lake Superior.

More than 40 commercial carp fishermen in the Lake Pepin area have been idled by an order of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration regarding PCBs, and a group called Citizens for the Preservation of Lake Pepin has similarly urged a national ban on the sale of the chemicals through inclusion in the proposed Toxic Substances Control Act.

In associated action Tuesday, the PCA board issued an invitation to other Great Lakes states and Canadian provinces to participate in a conference aimed at controlling the shipment of toxic and hazardous substances on Lake Superior.

The conference was urged as one of the last acts of former PCA Director Grant Merritt, who resigned from the post Tuesday. Merritt, who rose to the directorship of the agency 4½ years ago through his concern for Lake Superior, told the board there is an increasing variety of toxic and hazardous substances being shipped on the lake, largely because of the ease and economy of tanker transport.

He warned that if there is no control imposed, huge amounts of sulfuric acid could be shipped by water following the onset of copper-nickel mining in the state.

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