Tainted carp killed off in a Suson Park lake

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Hundreds of tainted carp containing unsafe levels of a chemical contaminant have been killed off in a Suson Park lake—one of two St. Louis County fishing lakes containing the toxin-ridden fish.

Tests performed by the St. Louis County Health Department after the danger was brought to light in several Globe-Democrat stories found that about 25 per cent of the carp sampled in one small lake at Suson Park in South County and Spanish Lake Park in North County were contaminated with levels of PCB (polychlorinated biphenal).

The tainted fish were found to have levels as high as 12 parts per million or more than twice the amount of the chemical considered safe for human consumption by the Food and Drug Administration. The chemical is used in industrial paper processing.

Federal standards set 5 parts per million as a safe human level for the chemical which has induced liver cancer and sterility in laboratory animals.

BECAUSE OF the size of Spanish Lake—about 40 acres—the county has not yet decided what steps it should take, said County Parks and Recreation Director Wayne C. Kennedy.

Because of a drainage problem, the use of powerful chemicals to kill off the fish also could kill fish in the Mississippi River, Kennedy said.

A possible step being studied is to confiscate any carp caught in Spanish Lake from fishermen and post signs warning patrons of the park not to eat any carp taken from the lake, he said.

Last week several hundred carp were killed in Carp Lake at Suson Park. The lake was drained and a neutralizing agent used before it was refilled. The lake will be stocked with catfish, Kennedy said.

Catfish, bass, crappie, bluegill and other game fish are not tainted with PCB levels, FDA officials said.

THE TAINTED carp were stocked in the two lakes about two years ago when shipments of fish were brought into Missouri by live fish dealers from the Green Bay, Wis., area where there are many paper mills. Since then, the FDA has prohibited the interstate shipment of fish from that area.

Live fish haulers are now using uncontaminated interior lakes in Wisconsin as sources of fish for stocking public and private fishing lakes.

About 73,000 persons fished in the two county-operated fishing lakes in the last two years, and it is likely some of them ate the tainted fish, park officials acknowledge.

However, the level of PCB found in the fish tested would not pose a health problem unless someone ate great quantities of the carp, a marine biologist said.

Illinois regional FDA investigator Kenneth O. Buercklin, who warned the two county lakes may contain contaminated carp, estimates as many as 150 Missouri fishing lakes may have the same problem.

The Kansas City Regional FDA office denied Buercklin's allegations when earlier questioned by The Globe-Democrat, saying, "We know of no such problem in Missouri."

Attempts to Kansas City FDA officials for comment on the test findings by the county Health Department were unsuccessful Sunday.

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