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MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

JOINT STATEMENT OF HEALTH ADVISORY FOR

CONSUMPTION OF ASHTABULA RIVER FISH

Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

For Immediate Release

CONTACT: Robert Indian, ODH
(614) 466-0281
Allan Franks, OEPA
Patricia Morrison, OEPA
(614) 466-8508

The Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency today recommended that people not eat fish caught in a two mile length of the Ashtabula River due to possible contamination with PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls) and other organic chemicals. The area involved extends from the mouth of the Ashtabula River, including the harbor area within the breakwater, to the 24th Street bridge in Ashtabula. All species of fish are included in the advisory, which will remain in effect until further studies indicate that the fish are safe to eat.

Recent analyses of fish caught in this area have revealed high levels of PCB's, hexachlorobenzene, pentachlorobenzene, and tetrachloroethane. Similar advisories are in effect in Michigan, Wisconsin, New York and Ontario, Canada.

Ohio EPA Director Robert Maynard said "A specific source of the contamination has not been pinpointed. Over the years, many industries in the area have used PCB's and other organic chemicals."

Ohio EPA and U.S. EPA are studying the Ashtabula River and Fields Brook to determine the extent of contamination and possible cleanup alternatives. "The only evidence we have right now comes from the two mile advisory area, and we can't say yet that fish taken upstream of the study area are not contaminated, too," Maynard noted.

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PCB's were widely used as an industrial coolant prior to being banned by U.S. EPA in 1979. Hexachlorobenzene and pentachlorobenzene are used in chemical manufacturing, and tetrachloroethane is an industrial solvent.

The chemicals involved remain in the environment for long periods of time and can accumulate in human fat tissue when ingested. According to Dr. Thomas Gardner, Acting Director of the Ohio Department of Health, there should be no immediate health effects from fish consumption with the levels found, but there is concern for the long term health effects as the chemicals accumulate in the body.

The U.S. FDA (Food and Drug Administration) allows human consumption of up to 5 ppm (parts per million) PCB's in fish. Sample results indicated levels of PCB's ranging from 2.4 ppm to 58.3 ppm in the edible portions of the fish. PCB's are known to cause skin disruptions, liver problems, and reproductive problems in humans when ingested in large quantities.

The U.S. FDA does not have a standard for the other chemicals. Hexachlorobenzene, pentachlorobenzene, and tetrachloroethane are suspected of causing cancer or birth defects in animals when ingested in large quantities over long periods of time.

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