Relax, Most Fish Safe to Eat

PLEASE DO NOT SEND

By DAVE SCOTT
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Lake Erie's fish have been given a clean bill of health, but government agents say fishermen should still be wary of their biggest catches.

Recent tests of chemical amounts in younger fish show results well within the safe range.

But bigger fish that have been in the lake for more than five years probably carry chemicals from previous years when mercury and polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) were dumped into the lake without controls.

MONKEYS FED PCB lost hair and had trouble reproducing.

The most recent mercury contamination scare came in 1971 in fish caught in Lake St. Clair near Detroit and western Lake Erie. But Dieter Busch, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Sandusky, says recent testing near Sandusky Bay shows a 60 per cent reduction of mercury contamination in fish.

Busch says some of the large walleyes and white fish which survived the years when mercury and PCB were pumped into the lake may have more than the allowable amount of chemicals.

Commercial fishing for these species was banned for a short time in 1971 when mercury levels were found over the one-half-part-per-million limit.

MERCURY AND PCB enter the waters in extremely small amounts but accumulate in the fatty portions of the fish.

PCB is extremely resistant to heat and is used in cooling oils for electrical transformers, paints, fireproof sealants and "carbonless" carbon paper.



TENDING THE NET — Bruce Call, Ohio Wildlife survey clerk, inspects some perch caught off the Fairport Harbor breakwall. Surveys show nearly all fish in Lake Erie now are safe for eating. (News-Herald photo by Brian Minch)

The Monsanto Corporation, the lone United States producer of PCB, has agreed to sell the chemical only to customers that have approved methods of disposing of it.

U.S. FOOD and Drug Administration officials say nearly all fish taken from Lake Erie contain less than the five-parts-per-million "acceptable" limit for PCB. But fish taken from Lake Michigan have had higher levels of contamination and officials there have suggested fishermen not eat more than one fish meal per week.

Richard Winkhofer of the U.S. EPA office in Cleveland says testing in Michigan is more sophisticated than in Ohio. He said more complete testing of Lake Erie fish might indicate higher levels of contamination than are presently found. Until then, however, he said he accepts the current findings.

Fish population in Lake Erie has declined so much that commercial fishing is nearly non-existant, say officials of the Kishman Fish Co. of Euclid, one of the largest local distributors. Only a few perch are taken locally by commercial fishermen, with most of the fish coming from inland Canadian lakes.

So amateur fishermen just about have the lake to themselves and can expect all but the "whoppers" to provide wholesome eating.

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