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Natural Resources panel urges ban on use of PCB

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The Michigan Natural Resources Commission urged the legislature and the nation Friday to ban use and production of a chemical which is contaminating fish in Lake Michigan.

The chemical, polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), is used in a variety of household products. The vote was 5-4.

"We hope this state will lead the nation in banning PCB," the commission said in a statement. Commission Chairman Carl Johnson said he sees no alternative other

than an outright ban.

Fish in Lake Michigan have PCB levels above the limits allowed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The FDA has seized some shipments of chubb caught in Lake Michigan because PCB levels were found to be up to 20 parts per million. The FDA legal level is five parts per million. Human health could be endangered at a level of 500 parts per million, the FDA said.

PCBs appear in a wide range of products, from paper to hand soap.

The sole U.S. manufacturer is Monsanto Chemical Co., of St. Louis.

The company agreed in the early 1970s to stop selling PCB for some industrial uses. But the chemical has since been sold for other industrial, commercial and household use.

"A ban is a drastic step to take, but this is a drastic problem," said William Turney, director of water management for the Department of Natural Resources.

There was no immediate response to the ban idea from

legislative leaders.

Chemical levels of DDT and most other chemical contaminants have declined in Michigan since 1970, test show.

But Turney said levels of PCB in Lake Michigan have stayed the same or increased in different fish sampled.

When PCB was first discovered in Saginaw Bay in 1969, levels of the chemical in catfish were up to 200 parts per million.

"We're not unique. Other states, if they take a look at it, will discover that they have similar levels to contend with," said Howard Tanner, director of the DNR.

"I would like to see Michigan lead the way (in banning use of PCBs) because I think it could be much more detrimental to mankind than we had realized," said Johnson.

Tests at the University of Wisconsin showed Rhesus monkeys became ill, even at levels of less than five parts per million.

But Turney emphasized the tests are only on monkeys and that the evidence does not mean human beings are affected by those relatively low levels.