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Consumption Limit Advised Of Fish Containing PCB's

MADISON — The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) suggests, on advice from the State Division of Health, that persons limit their consumption of large trout and salmon from Lake Michigan, and other fish the Upper Mississippi River, and from the Fox River near Portage.

Fish in these waters contain more than the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) acceptable levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's).

The FDA has set the public health action level for commercial fish at five parts per million (ppm) of PCB's. Recognizing that some larger fish in these waters contain more than 5ppm, the division of health recommends that, "sports fishermen be advised to refain from eating more than one meal per week of such fish, and that pregnant women and children be cautioned to limit their intake to one average size serving of such fish each week."

Fish from the following waters have been found to exceed the acceptable level:

- Lake Michigan and Green Bay trout and salmon, including lake trout, coho, salmon, chinook salmon, and brown trout, over 24 inches in length.
- Many fish in the Mississippi River between Prescott and lower Lake Pepin.
- Many fish in the Fox River from Portage north to the Columbia County line.

The State Department of Agriculture (DA) has announced that it will take action and seize any fish offered for commercial sale containing more than 5 ppm of PCB's. Lake trout over 24 inches long caught by commercial fishermen in Lake Michigan incidental to their netting operations for other speicies, will no longer be sold for human consumption. The DNR will provide the DA with samples of these fish for testing and regulatory purposes.

A surveillance program to identify and abate sources of PCB discharge will be continued by the DNR along with its fish monitoring program. Fish from Lake Michigan and Green Bay, the Upper Mississippi River, the Fox River downstream from Portage, and other waters will be monitored for PCB's. This will be a cooperative program with other states, the FDA, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The DNR also will request authorization from the Natural Resources Board to hold hearings to investigate the sale, use and distribution of PCB's along with the necessity of regulating or banning the discharge of PCB's into the environment.

Knowledgeable testimony from experts in industry and government will be solicited for such testimony.

According to the DNR, the problem of PCB's is not unique to Wisconsin, but also involves Minnesota and Michigan.

Several weeks ago, the FDA ordered 20,000 pounds of carp fillets, originally caught in Lake Pepin, buried after they were found to contain concentrations of as much as 14 ppm of PCB's. Subsequently, the Minnesota Department of Health advised sports fishermen that it would be prudent to limit the eating of no more than one meal of fish per week of those taken from the Mississippi River between Minneapolis and Lake Pepin.

PCB's were not discovered in the environment until 1966 in Sweden. The Wisconsin DNR has conducted studies on PCB's since 1968. A warning was issued concerning limiting consumption of Lake Michigan and Upper Mississippi River fish in 1971 because of high PCB levels.

PCB's have been used in coolant-insulation fluids in some transformers and capacitors, heat transfer units, machine tool cutting oils, hydraulic fluids, electrical wiring insulation, and epoxy paints. They also occur in sewage treatment plant and some pulp and paper mill effluents. They may enter the air through vaporization or incineration, or enter the water via fallout or runoff.

Like DDT, the PCB's are fat soluble with low solubility in water. Therefore they are concentrated in the fat of animals, particularly fish. They are very stable and tend to persist in the environment.

Michigan Moves

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state Department of Natural Resources may seek a legislative ban on a chemical contaminant officials say is turning up at "alarming levels" in Lake Michigan fish.

The chemical is polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), used in household products from handsoap to paper.

"If the Environmental Protection Agency is not in a position to act nationally, we may have to go to the legislature and effect a ban on PCBs in any product," said William Turney, chief of the bureau of water management at the DNR.

Turney said the EPA may not be able to act because of statutory limitations on its authority.

PCBs appeared at such high levels in Lake Michigan fish earlier this year the Food and Drug Administration seized some shipments of chubs. The agency said PCB levels were "dangerously high."

FDA limits are five parts per million, but some of the chubs had as much as 30 parts per million. Potentially harmful to humans are levels of 500 parts per million.

Turney told the Natural Resources Commission in a report Thursday the situation is "alarming" because PCB levels have remained the same or increased since 1970, rather than decreasing as predicted.

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