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Affected Fish Destroyed

PCB Found in Fish from Area Waters

By Paul Gale
Of the Intelligencer

Contamination by toxic chemicals known as PCBs has been found in fish taken from area waters, according to Kenneth Buercklin of the federal Food and Drug Administration office in Edwardsville.

Buercklin said the toxic chemicals exceeded the minimum requirements by a "considerable margin."

PCBs were found by the agency in the fish in Arnold Barth's fee fishing lake near Bunker Hill recently.

The Illinois Department of Conservation told Barth to either kill the fish or not open up again in the Spring.

Barth complied and killed 50,000 pounds of carp, 2,400 pounds of flathead catfish and 400 pounds of channel catfish. He estimated his losses at $10,000.

"All of the fish which tested high in PCBs came out of Green Bay. We hauled almost all of our fish out of Green Bay, but now our suppliers are closed down because of the high concentrations of PCBs found up there," Barth said.

The Associated Press reported PCB contamination has been most severe in the Great Lakes and the Hudson River, but the pollution is rapidly becoming a nationwide threat to fisheries, wildlife and human health.

Polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBS, are produced solely by the St. Louis-based Monsanto Co. They have been used since 1930 in products ranging from hydraulic fluids to carbonless copying paper and textile sealants.

Monsanto limited its sales in 1971 to the manufacturers of electrical transformers and capacitors.

PCBs have caused liver cancer and reproductive failures in laboratory animals.

Neither Buercklin or Barth have ever received a complaint from anyone claiming to have become ill from eating toxic fish. However, PCBs are considered a threat to public health.

Barth doubts that PCBs can seriously harm a person. "I guess there is some pollution in these fish, but I don't think it is as serious as they make it up to be," Barth said.

"I've been putting these fish from Green Bay in the lake for eight or nine years now and nothing has ever happened," Barth said.

"Maybe if you ate too much your hair would fall out. I heard once that a person in Japan died because of poison fish. But, he was on a full fish diet for 20 years," Barth said.

Barth said his lake is cleared away and is ready for a fresh supply of fish if they can be found.

He has already stocked it with 10,000 pounds of bullheads, but other kinds of fish are now very scarce, he said.

"Each new batch of fish will require a health certificate. Healthy fish that can pass the tests required to get a health certificate are in short supply and they will cost more. Now that Green Bay is closed, I don't know where I will get more fish," he said.

Barth said he has hired a lawyer to look into the possibility of suing the company in Green Bay that sold him the toxic fish.

He said his lawyer is also looking into restitution funds from the federal government.

Barth said he might get restitution, the same as chicken farmers in Mississippi received federal money for poisoned chickens a few years ago.

Buercklin said it would take an act of Congress to get Barth his money back.

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