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Fishermen Warned About Eating Trout

LANSING (UPI) — State Public Health Director Maurice Reizen is warning Lake Michigan fishermen to limit their consumption of lake trout because they contain high levels of the industrial chemical PCB.

"I would have no qualms about advising sports fishermen to be cautious about eating frequent or large amounts of the fish," Reizen said Tuesday. "Sensible precautions are indicated at this time."

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources already has urged fishermen to limit their intake of lake trout, which contain more than the federal government's acceptable PCB level of 5 parts per million.

Reizen said his department was attempting to determine whether fishermen should also watch their eating of other Lake Michigan species.

He said fishermen should refrain from eating more than one meal per week of the trout and that pregnant women and children should be particularly cautious.

State officials maintain that it is not now known whether PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, is harmful to humans.

However, the state Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, has begun seizing shipments of fish it believes may contain higher-than-permitted levels of PCB.

Howard Tanner, director of the state Department of Natural Resources, said new research at the University of Wisconsin has shown that PCB is hazardous to rhesus monkeys. But this does not necessarily mean the chemical is harmful to humans, he said.

The DNR last week said it found "alarming" levels of the chemical in fish and immediately began pressing for a complete ban on the use of PCB in industrial processes.

The chemical, whose sole U.S. producer is Monsanto Co., is used as a hydraulic fluid, heat transfer fluid and insulation in electrical transformers. It is a "first cousin" to polybrominated biphenyl (PBB) which has contaminated thousands of Michigan livestock.

Lake trout are primarily a sportsfish but often are taken accidentally by commercial fishermen.

Tanner said his agency would support Reizen's call for limits on consumption but that it was not the DNR's proper role to actually urge limitations.

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