Senate panel gets Choccolocco data on contamination

WASHINGTON — A Senate subcommittee Wednesday received a study showing industrial contamination of fish taken from Choccolocco Creek.

The Alabama Department of Conservation told a Senate commerce subcommittee that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) in amounts "as high as 360 part per million" or 72 times the guideline set for the substance by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration had been found in several species of fish.

Sam L. Spencer, assistant chief of fisheries of the Alabama Department of Conservation, wrote the subcommittee in May that PCB had been found last year in catfish, bass, carp and blacktailed redhorse.

Spencer said tests "indicated PCB levels of up to 227 parts per million in catfish." The FDA guideline for PCB is five parts per million.

He said he had to request the PCB analysis from the FDA, which originally provided him only a mercury-content analysis. "The FDA apparently did not intend to advise us of this contamination problem."

When told of the Alabama report, Dr. Robert Risenbrough, a professor at the Institute of Marine Resources at the University of California at Berkeley and a PCB authority, said, "I certainly would not advise eating those fish."

Risenbrough told the subcommittee that PCB chemicals had "become widespread pollutants in the global environment."

He told of an outbreak of chloroacne, a skin disease, in Japan in 1968 that was traced to a cooking oil contaminated with PCB.

Among 300 people affected, he said, nine were pregnant women. Two of the babies were stillborn, and "all showed symptoms of chlorobiphenyl poisoning."

Risenbrough said a study showed the "concentration of PCB in the rice oil was about 200 parts per million and that the oil consumed by a family of four over a month was in the order of 1.8 liters," one-tenth of a gram.

The testimony about Alabama and Japan came while the subcommittee considered the administration's bill to control toxic chemicals, including PCB.

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