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Seafood exec asks ban on PCB chemical

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CHICAGO — The head of an association representing the seafood industry has called for an immediate ban on the sale, production, importation or recycling of the PCB toxic chemical.

"The potential risk to the American food supply is too great to ignore," said Lee Weddig, executive director of the National Fisheries Institute.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are chemicals widely used in industry, primarily as lubricants in the manufacture of adhesives, sealants, printing inks, coatings and waxes. They are similar in composition to DDT.

Weddig urged passage of a toxic substance control law, which was recommended by a 1972 federal task force. He also advocated a nationwide system for safe disposal of PCBs already in use.

Weddig said he favored retaining the FDA's tolerance level for PCB presence in fish at 5 ppm, pending further investigation. But he also recommended government compensation to commercial fishermen whose livelihood is destroyed by prohibition of sales of fish exceeding the tolerance level.

The Environmental Protection Agency has a "clear legal mandate" to establish effluent standards for PCB discharge, Weddig declared, adding that Congress should learn why the EPA has not yet created such standards.

Regarding compensation for fishermen, Weddig remarked: "The fishermen didn't dump the PCB in the water. They shouldn't have to bear the entire cost of our society's mistake."

The EPA also was criticized by Lee Botts, executive director of the Lake Michigan Federation, a coalition of citizens groups in Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin.

Botts said she was "dismayed" at the "failure of the government to protect the lake and those of us who depend on it against PCB contamination."

She said the federation had "asked for and waited" for regulatory action on toxic substances, including PCB's, pointing out that "attention was called to PCBs as a potential danger" in 1971.

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