NOV 2 1975

What Alternative To Poisoned Lake Fish?



Dateline: Calumet

By Bob Seltzer

Now it is PCB.

It seems we are bound and determined to destroy our environment one way or another. Or maybe it will be the environment destroying us.

PCB is short for polychlorinated biphenyl, a heat transfer medium used largely in the electrical industry, which has been accumulating in Lake Michigan since 1929 in such amounts that today it has contaminated most of the fish in the lake and made them dangerous to eat.

The so-called pollution experts didn't even know there was such a thing until this year. Now the National Fisheries Institute Inc., wants PCB use to cease because of "the potential risk to the American food supply." In neighboring Michigan the legislature is considering a bill to prohibit the manufacture of PCB except under strict government control.

Coho salmon for example from Lake Michigan have 10 times the amount of the toxic chemical higher than the five parts per million pure foods limit set by the Food and Drug Administration. All of them. Not just some. Lake Michigan trout are also all infected. Some three-quarters of all the lake's smelts are in the same condition.

PCB also is used in making plastics. Probably other things. It is a material considered out and out poison. Lake Michigan is full of it, far more than the other Great Lakes. If you eat enough fish from the lake it can poison you. If it doesn't kill you, it can cause physical breakdowns. It can be deadly to pregnant women and children are especially susceptible.

That takes care of the fish in Lake Michigan. Commercial fishing in Lake Michigan, which already is extensively curtailed, probably now will be banned altogether.

It is a terribly discouraging situation for those concerned with the environment, but particularly this invaluable lake, which after all is such a vital segment of the overall environment. But it also tends to alert us.

Just how many more ingredients in the air we breath, the food we eat, and the water we drink will be discovered in upcoming times and found to be deadly to life? All those years that we have been smothering the Calumet region's steel making mills for dumping poisons into Lake Michigan and our inland rivers and streams, the steel making mills have been fighting back in a variety of ways. The mills boomed on the shores of Lake Michigan and on major rivers have positively because they needed multi-millions of gallons of water in their operations. The mills draw the water in, use it to clean steel and for other industrial purposes, then pump it back into the lake. The water is heated. It also carries a variety of particles with it. The argument goes on and on over the degree of danger this creates to the lake.

But it isn't only the steel making mills. It is nearly every aspect of our industrial production procedure, and probably in ways we still don't even know. We put much blind faith into the environmental protection agencies at the various levels. But we shouldn't. The EPAs are not only inadequate to the task at the professional level, politics has often rendered them inept. Some would call it corrupt.

But we are truly caught in this ecological trap. We cannot very well shut everything down that is or might be polluting the waters.

If all the steel making plants, power generators, and thousands and thousands of million outfalls of all the industrial operations along the lake only were shut down tomorrow—absolutely halted—could we continue to function?

That's the threat of industry, of course, that if the environmentalists keep harassing, industry might just quit. Well, suppose that happened. What would happen? A lot of people would be out of work, of course. There would follow a domino reaction. Economically the region would collapse.

What's the alternative? Is there one? Is it really dead swimming? Poisoned fish in Lake Michigan should be a warning of some kind, wouldn't you think?

MONS 033349