PCB study indicates toxic levels lower at Cannelton dam

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Results of a study by the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO) released this week show that the PCB, polyclorinated biphenyl, a chemical linked to cancer and birth defects, levels in catfish analyzed near the Cannelton Dam in Perry County is lower than it was a year ago.

The latest study conducted here in October shows that the PCB level is 1.4 parts per million which is down from 4 parts per million last year. Both readings, it was pointed out in the study, are below the parts per million federal danger standard established by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

In all, 11 sites were tested in a 981-mile stretch of the Ohio River from Pittsburgh, Pa. to Paducah, Ky. Unsafe amounts of PCBs were found at six of the sites, but below Louisville the PCB level at sites at Cannelton, Uniontown, and Paducah were below the danger level.

The highest reading, according to Jessica Barron, public information director for ORSANCO, was at Louisville's McAlpine Dam where a reading of 20.8 parts was secured.

The level at Meldahl, between Maysville and Cincinnati, was 16.6 parts per million. Other high readings were 9.7 parts per million near Pittsburgh, 6 near Wheeling, W. Va., 6.8 near Marietta, Ohio, and 6.4 near Carrollton, Ky.

PCBs are industrial chemicals mainly

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used as insulating fluids in transformers and large capacitors because of their remarkable flame retardent properties, according to Jessica Barron, information specialist for ORSANCO in Cincinnati.

While PCB concentrations in wastewater are normally quite small, usually measured in parts per million, they undergo biomagnification upward through the food chain until man may finally ingest much higher concentrations than found in wastewater discharge. Ms. Barron told The News Monday.

Last January Monsanto, the only American producer of PCBs announced that it would discontinue production of PCBs as soon as an acceptable substitute is found.

General Electric and Westinghouse, two major industrial users of PCBs, said they would seek other products as soon as a suitable alternate is devised.

Indiana has been a front-runner in legislation to eliminate the use of PCBs. In its last session the General Assembly passed a measure which could soon phase out the use of PCB products in the state. Indiana becomes the first state in the nation to do so.

The fish samples were taken from the Cannelton Dam and the other 10 sites along the Ohio River by officials from ORSANCO, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and other state agencies.

What the latest study means is that a PCB content does exist at the Cannelton Dam, but the problem has improved.

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