ORLANDO, FLA.
SENTINEL STAR
D. 115,000 S. 148,000

MAR 14 1976

Toxic PCBs Found In Lake Again

By CHRISTINA EVANS
Sentinel Star Staff

For the second time, a significant level of polychlorinated biphenyls — poisonous man-made chemical compounds — has been found in a sample of sediment taken from Lake Kissimmee in Osceola County.

Several samples from the lake were tested by the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation last month after the chemicals were first discovered in mud on the floor of the lake in 1974. In the recent test, only one sample was contaminated.

POLYCHLORINATED biphenyls, called PCBs by the chemists who work with them, are a class of thick, liquid chemicals that have been designated a significant health hazard by the Environmental Protection Agency because they are toxic, virtually indestructible and can accumulate in the food chain.

Two other Central Florida waterways in which PCBs were found at high levels in 1974 — the Apopka-Beauclair canal in Lake County and the Withlacoochee River between Citrus and Sumter counties — were given a clean bill after the most recent tests.

George Gionis, district chemist for the St. Johns River District of the environmental regulation department, said no trace of the chemicals was found in the canal between Lakes Apopka and Beauclair or in the Withlacoochee River although sediment from the same testing stations was resampled last year and this year.

GIONIS suggested the samples taken in 1974 could have been contaminated in the laboratory, which would explain why the chemicals did not appear in later tests.

"I would put very little emphasis on one sampling," he said.

The danger of the chemicals was first suspected in 1966 when a Swedish chemist discovered what was later determined to be PCBs in dead fish.

SCIENTISTS HAVE determined that the chemicals — used extensively in large electrical capacitors and transformers — are poisonous and can cause stillbirths, bone and joint deformities, various nervous disorders and possibly cancer.

Dr. Paul Parks, chief chemist for the environmental regulation department in Tallahassee, said he believes the levels of the chemicals found in the three Central Florida waterways were caused by spills or dumps from electrical equipment.

In the Beauclair Canal and Withlocoochee River, Parks said, the problem probably was a "one-shot affair — a spill or dump that has become dispersed."

ALTHOUGH PARKS said the source of the PCBs found in Lake Kissimmee has not been determined, he said he believes that problem also was caused by a spill because there is no electric plant around the lake to steadily discharge the material into the water.

Also, the chemicals were found in only one of several sediment samples taken from the lake. Parks said a sample taken 150 feet from the contaminated sediment showed no trace of PCBs.

And, he said, because the chemicals were found near a dam on the lake, the problem could have been caused by a spill of hydraulic fluid from electrical equipment at the dam.

PARKS SAID he could not determine the consequences of the chemical concentration found in the Lake Kissimmee sample, but said it could be more environmentally damaging than helpful to dredge the lake bottom in an effort to remove the sediment.

He suggested the problem in Lake Kissimmee is more an environmental menace than a health hazard.

"In Lake Kissimmee, as far as we know, we have only this one spot. I don't think it would have a significant effect on fish," he said.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL regulation department does little testing of fish, but Parks said the Federal Food and Drug Administration does monitor the concentration of the chemicals in fish sold commercially for human consumption — the limit is 5 parts per million — and the Environmental Protection Agency is informed of any significant quantities of the chemicals found in waterways.

More extensive concentrations of PCBs have been found in south Florida waterways, but, because so little is known about the chemicals, little is being done to remove them.

Sediment from all the Central Florida Waterways will be tested again next year, Parks said, but there is no point in continuous testing for spills because there is no remedy for the problem.

The best solution, he said, is to prevent the dispersion of PCBs by preventing careless dumping of the chemicals.

MONS 037104