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PCB Found In Rock River

By Jane Wiskirchen
of the Times

DIXON, Ill. — State officials have determined a salvage yard here unknowingly dumped a dangerous contaminant into the Rock River over 20 years.

UNTIL last July, Sinow & Wienman Co., located just below the Dixon dam, junked electrical transformers containing polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB).

The chemical leaked from the tranaformers, bought from Commonwealth Edison Co., into the soil and ran into the river, said Leo Rock, regional fishery manager for the Illinois Department of Conservation, Division of Fisheries.

Officials first detected dangerous PCB levels in fish and soil last October along 12 miles of the river between the Sterling and Dixon dams. They immediately alerted fishermen along the popular stretch to eat no more than half a pound of fish weekly.

"Most (fish and soil samples) showed PCB levels below five parts per million (the highest acceptable level), but some are above that," Rock said.

IN MARCH, the state discovered the salvage yard was the source of the contamination, but it did not release that information until about a month ago for fear the salvage yard might be unduly prosecuted, he said.

"The yard has fully cooperated with the Environmental Protection Agency and will remove the junk and cover the yard with a heavy clay. They also will install a monitoring well by the water so the EPA can test for leaks. It's going to be a costly operation, but the yard wants to help," Rock said.

The federal government has ordered a halt to the production of PCB. Monsanto Corp., the sole manufacturer of the chemical, has curtailed production, Rock said.

Rock said he is awaiting results of new tests on channel catfish and flathead fish, which were found last year with high levels of PCB.

ALTHOUGH PCB was found in all species of fish tested, catfish are particularly prone to ingesting the chemical because they feed off the river bottoms, where PCB settles.

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