

CENTRAL SQUARE, N. Y.
CITIZEN-OUTLET
(SYRACUSE MARKET AREA)
W. 4,000

SEP 24 1975

Oswego River May Be Cause of Toxic PCB Compound

A study by the Environmental Protection Agency has identified the Oswego River as one apparent source of the toxic compound called PCBs in Lake Ontario, it was learned last week.

Meanwhile, the latest tests performed by the Department of Environmental Conservation in Albany on salmon and trout from the lake indicated PCB levels ranging from 2 parts per million for small coho salmon to 22 parts per million for large Chinook salmon. The Food and Drug Administration prohibits the sale of fish containing more than 6 parts per million.

A report last week quoted DEC Commissioner Ogden Reid as saying he was considering a ban on the sale of Chinook salmon from Lake Ontario because of high PCB levels. However, salmon is not a commercial species. In fact, an employee at Oshiti's Fish Co. in Oswego, one of the few commercial fishermen on the American side of the lake, said commercial fishers are not allowed to catch salmon.

The DEC still has taken no action on plans for a salmon fish hatchery in Altmar. The plans were submitted to the department early this year and are now on Reid's desk. A DEC official said Friday that the Commissioner "is still making up his mind." Asked what issues were being considered, the official refused to comment further. Reid was not in Albany. The EPA report naming the

Oswego River as an "important" source of PCBs in the lake was published in June and contained data taken in 1972. The report also singled out the Niagara River as a source of PCBs.

The EPA researchers tested DDT, DIELDRIN AND PCB levels in water, sediment, bottom organisms, plankton, seaweed and fish. Samples were taken from as many as 8 stations, depending on what was being tested.

The data indicated comparatively high levels of PCBs in the water and sediment off the mouth of the Oswego and Niagara Rivers. The fish tested were alewives, small and sculpin. Most samples had less than 5 parts per million of PCB's but some sculpin samples were as high as 9 parts per million.

Like DDT, the PCB compound tends to concentrate in fat, and PCB levels in the fat of the same fish ranged from 11.7 parts per million to 179.8 parts per million. It is for this reason that the Sea Grant office in Oswego has recommended that anyone eating Lake Ontario salmon remove as much fat as possible before cooking it.

The EPA report recommended that a study of the "levels and forms" of PCBs in the Oswego and Niagara Rivers be done to "assess" the rivers as a source of the chemical.

PCBs are used in electric transformers. Studies have indicated that their consumption

can cause skin diseases and fetal damage, but there have been no reports of ill effects from eating fish from Lake Ontario.

The Monsanto Corp., the only manufacturer of PCBs in the United States, has told the DEC that the only American buyer of PCBs on Lake Ontario is the Niagara Transformer Corp. in Buffalo, on the Niagara River.

But a DEC official said there was growing concern about a "gray market" for PCBs, with suspicion that some American firms may be importing the compound and using it in "open" processes such as for paper, where it can get back into the environment. Several years ago, Monsanto pledged to sell it only for use in "closed" systems, as for electrical transformers. The official, who did not want to be named, also said some pollution by PCBs may be "uncontrollable" because it can get into the soil from landfills and leach into rivers.

Cal Symons, the director of pollution control for the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, said industrial users of PCBs in Ontario did not release any of the chemical to the lake. He said his department monitored the factories and provided special "burial" areas for transformers so that no PCBs would escape to the environment. Symons said he didn't know how many industries used PCBs in Ontario or where they were located.