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FDA seizes fish

WASHINGTON (AP) — Discovery of high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls in fish caught in the Hudson River and Lake Ontario is causing swift reaction by the federal and state governments.

The Food and Drug Administration says it will begin seizing fish sold in interstate commerce if they are found to contain higher-than allowed levels of PCBs. The agency also said it may lower the current 5 parts per million PBC ceiling now allowed.

Meanwhile, New York State officials, citing high concentrations of the chemicals found in fish caught along the lower 200 miles of the Hudson River, have banned almost all commercial fishing in the affected area. Further testing might force extension of the ban to Long Island Sound and Atlantic Ocean waters just south of Long Island, they said.

The FDA and New York State actions were announced Wednesday.

PCBs are now primarily used in the manufacture of electrical equipment, but before 1971 were used in pesticides, carbonless copy paper, inks, lubricants, hydraulic fluids and adhesives.

Two environmental groups petitioned the FDA last year to reduce gradually the federal PCB tolerances in food to zero, charging PCBs cause cancer, reproductive failure, skin disease, nervous disorders and stillbirths among workers exposed directly to the chemical.

Almost indestructable, PCBs previously leaked into the environment have persisted. "Continued industrial discharge and disposal" of PCBs is responsible for the Hudson River levels, the FDA said.