Minneapolis Tribune
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.
D. 240,275 SUN. 674,302

SEP 19 1976



Ron Schara

Bay City, Wis.
Milt Sorensen slumped into his office chair, crossed a knee and gazed out the window toward the river.

In the next room, the remnants of his business, his life, lay scattered and unused, the fish baskets, the huge walk-in cooler, a rusty scale. In another time Sorensen's Fish Market was a busy place, cleaning, packing, shipping the products of a commercial fisherman. But the place was quiet now.

"Cripes, yeah, I've lost thousands," he said. "I can only sell about half of what I catch.

"Yeah, I guess I'm bitter about it. The government is trying to do the right thing. But the government doesn't do enough to stop the pollution."

Milt Sorensen, 46, is an environmental casualty. After 25 years of plying the Mississippi and harvesting its rough-fish bounty, he is about done. He's the victim of a man-made chemical, something called PCBs, an abbreviation for polychlorinated biphenyls. An industrial chemical, made by Monsanto. A chemical dangerous to human health. High concentrations have caused cancer in test animals.

The carp in Milt Sorensen's nets probably had high concentrations. Tests last year showed that the carp in Lake Pepin, a wide spot on the river, had PCB levels above the federal guidelines. Particularly fish over 5-pounds.

Milt Sorensen doesn't remember how he got the word. "But I got it. They said don't ship any carp over 5 pounds or I'd be asking for trouble."

There won't be any trouble.

"I've decided to sell," he said the other day. "I've been thinking about it since the first of the year. There was some talk about government loans to help us get into a different business but I haven't heard any more."

Sorensen doesn't expect any rush of buyers for the business, either. "Maybe I'll just sell the buildings," he said, "except I probably can't get what they're worth.

"The fishing has been real good but the carp are starting to run big (over 5 pounds). Another year and the small carp may get scarce unless there's a good hatch. Of course, it'll take awhile before they're available.

"If the business was good I don't think I'd get out of it. Fishing isn't the softest job. Sometimes you don't appreciate it. The river gets miserable but then it can be fun, too."

He smiled weakly. The river has been his life since he was 14. His father was a commercial fisherman. Sorensen later joined the business and eventually took over. It's never been a get-rich occupation. Even before such things as PCBs, Sorensen said, the rough fish market had been declining over the years.

And long before pollution made the headlines, Sorensen cussed a society that dumped "everything" in the river.

Sorensen stared out the window again. "There's not much other work on the river. Maybe I can work a dredge for a barge line."

He paused. "I guess I really don't want to quit fishing."

He paused again.

"I don't know what else I can do."

MONS 037227