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Contaminated Fish Removed From Lakes

The Department of Conservation has removed all fish from five St. Louis city park lakes and has buried them after some recently - stocked fish were found to be contaminated with PCB, an industrial chemical.

The fish, all carp, had been stocked in the five lakes, two in Willmore Park and one each in Fairground, O'Fallon and Hyde parks, as part of the Urban Fishing Program, co-sponsored by the Department of Conservation and the City of St. Louis.

They were bought from a commercial source in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and were stocked in the five lakes on July 31. On August 8, the federal Food and Drug Administration notified the Department of Conservation that its tests of fish from the shipment indicated levels of PCB averaging 50 parts per million. Five parts per million is the highest acceptable level.

The department immediately closed the lakes to fishing and on August 8, Fisheries Division personnel removed all fish - including those in the lake when the contaminated fish were stocked.

"This is one of those ironic and tragic by-products of modern life," says Charles Purkett, chief of Fisheries for the Department of Conservation. "What has been a warmly - received fishing program - suddenly contains dangers that our grandfathers or fathers couldn't have imagined."

The one producer of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) is Monsanto Chemical which is based in St. Louis. Although no one thinks St. Louisans who have caught and eaten carp with PCB residues could have eaten enough to harm them, PCB accumulates in the body and is eliminated very slowly.

No fish tested in Missouri ever have tested above the five ppm maximum, except for two isolated instances in the Bootheel area where the fish showed nine ppm several years ago.

"We'll restock the lakes within a couple of weeks," says Purkett. "The new fish will be entirely safe. And the chemical we used to remove the contaminated fish will be neutralized before new fish are stocked.

"Missourians are fortunate that we've escaped the problems so far of contaminants being concentrated in fish flesh. Other parts of the country have had serious problems with fish and even game birds being contaminated by various chemicals. We hope this is the last time Missouri has this kind of trouble."

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