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Industry Doubted as PCB Source

St. Paul, Minn. –AP– A task force report says industrial plants and sewage treatment facilities apparently are not major sources of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

The task force, involving agencies from Minnesota, Wisconsin and the federal government, was organized last spring to study the PCB pollution problem after fish with high PCB concentrations were found in Lake Pepin, a wide point in the Mississippi River.

"The industrial and municipal point sources which were sampled and found to contain PCBs cannot be considered significant sources of PCBs to the Mississippi River and its tributaries," according to the report released Wednesday.

PCBs are a group of toxic industrial chemicals which have been linked to reproductive failure in humans and animals, and also have been linked to certain types of cancer in laboratory animals.

Samples of river water were taken from Elk River, Minn., which is north of Minneapolis-St. Paul, downstream to Alma, Wis.

The task force said there apparently was a direct relationship between PCB concentration in fish and in bottom sediment. The report suggested that there were substantial PCB concentrations in the bottom sediment of the Mississippi, especially in Spring Lake and Lake Pepin.

The report indicated that river dredging activities stirred up the bottom sediment, allowing PCBs to mix with the water again.

The report tends to support theories that large quantities of PCBs dumped into the river in past years have settled to the bottom and are being stirred up periodically by dredging operations.

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