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Chemical Change Found in River

PAGE ONE

Levels of polychlorinated biphenyls in the Mississippi river are showing a definite drop, according to the Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area commission. Willis Mattison of Minnesota pollution control agency said May 16 tests reflected very low levels between the Twin Cities and Wabasha.

Lower levels will not reduce the danger of eating contaminated fish, Mattison warned. Earlier tests of Lake Pepin fish indicated PCB levels far in excess of a federal limit reaching five parts per million.

No source for the chemical has been identified. Suspected offenders, including a Red Wing tannery and a reflecting tape manufacturing plant at Cottage Grove, have been checked and cleared.

Commissioner Barbara Frank of LaCrosse said PCB levels in the LaCrosse area have been measured as high as 12.3 parts per million in normal monthly monitoring. That figure would not pose harm unless it continued over long periods.

Mattison said part of the chemical concentration in the Mississippi river might be traced to an oil leak at a terminal at Savage, Minn., in 1962. About a million gallons of PCB rich oil were lost. James Harrison, executive director of the boundary commission, said some of the problem might be coming from burned materials. PCB will not break down until a temperature of 1,600 degrees is reached.

Ethan Kockenderfer of Fountain City said increasing sediment in the area of Merrick state park was creating navigation problems for small boats used by fishermen and hunters. The commission agreed to ask for side channel inspections.

The boundary commission endorsed a petition for $1,994,000 to finance a Great River Environmental Action Team for 15 months.

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