More Tests Necessary

PCB in Lake Ontario Salmon Not to Jeopardize Industry

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Questions about the future of Oswego County's projected 35 million salmon sports fishing industry were raised this week when state officials announced that dangerously high amounts PCB, a toxic chemical used in a number of manufacturing processes, were found in salmon taken from Lake Ontario.

But several state Department of Environmental Conservation officials expressed confidence that the industry is not in jeopardy.

A warning by DEC Commissioner Ogden Reid and state Health Commissioner Dr. Robert P. Whelan advising consumers not to eat striped bass from the Hudson River and salmon from Lake Ontario will remain in effect for several weeks until more tests are performed, according to DEC officials.

William Pearce of the DEC Cape Vincent office, which is in charge of the salmon program in Oswego County, said that Lake Michigan had a similar problem three years ago and the salmon sports fishing industry is going strong there now.

Another DEC official who asked to remain anonymous said that even if the salmon were not fit for human consumption, the fish would be needed to maintain the ecological balance of the lake. "I wouldn't get concerned about the hatchery," he said, referring to the salmon hatchery planned for Altmar. Salmon eat fish that peril the lake, according to the spokesman.

Polychloriasted byphenyl or 'PCB' is similar chemically to the controversial insecticide DDT. It is a chlorinated hydrocarbon which is banned in Canada and Britain and used in the United States in the manufacture of plastics, paints, electrical transformers, printing ink, caulking compounds and hydraulic fluids.

Food containing more than five parts per million of PCB is unsafe to eat by Federal

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Lake Ontario Salmon

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He declined any further explanation.

A DEC spokesman said that although there will be an advisory until further tests are completed, no signs warning of the PCB will be placed at fishing sites.

Another question raised is whether drinking water contains PCB. Oswego obtains its drinking water from Lake Ontario. A spokesman for the state health department said Oswego's water was tested in 1972 and 1974 and no PCB was found. He said he doesn't see the situation as 'urgent' and predicted that public reaction to the PCB controversy will follow a pattern similar to the reaction after Mercury was discovered in tuna.

The Times report indicated that there are no data at present which suggest that eating fish from New York waters causes illness or death, but added that tests for PCB in post-mortium studies are not routine.

In other areas PCB has been known to have caused or correlated with incidents of skin disease and stillbirth in living near Lake Michigan has been documented," stated the Times article. Gilman D. Veith, head of the Federal E.P.A. National Water Quality Laboratory in Duluth said that minks eating fish with 0.4 parts per million of PCB failed to reproduce and suffered a mortality rate of 71 per cent. Adverse effects included pigmentation changes and liver enlargement have been noted in tests with rats, guinea pigs and chimpanzees.

Reid was reportedly concerned that the problem may involve more than just striped bass and salmon. He said it is important that the preliminary findings not frighten anyone, and that the findings must be more fully evaluated to determine what risks there are to humans in the concentrations found.

standards, according to a report which appeared in The New York Times Friday. The salmon taken out of Lake Ontario and tested had between 15 and 20 parts per million, according to the Times.

DEC officials said the salmon was taken from the eastern part of the lake and the Salmon River.

Shiner Minnows and rock bass taken from the Hudson River at Ford Edward and Hudson Falls contained much higher concentrations of the toxic chemical, according to the Times.

The report indicated that PCB is not biodegradable and could remain toxic in water for decades.

It said that in 1971 the presence of PCB in Lake Michigan ended its role as a commercial fishery. The report, however, did not state the effect on the sports fishing industry.

Earl J. Harris, associate analytical chemist at the DEC's Rome Pollution Lab told The Palladium-Times that the DEC had been testing salmon for seven or eight years and had consistently high readings.

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