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WARNING IGNORED ON STRIPED BASS

Fish is still being ordered by diners here despite report of a toxic peril.

By Richard Severo

At Gage & Tollner's in Brooklyn and at Sweet's in Manhattan, tourists and businessmen were eating striped bass as usual yesterday, and in Poughkeepsie they were drinking water as usual.

A warning from Ogden R. Reid, the State Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, that a toxic chemical called PCB had been found at high levels in striped bass in the Hudson vexed and confused restaurant owners, but their customers seemed to be ignoring, at least for now, Mr. Reid's advisory that striped bass from the Hudson not be eaten until tests are completed.

"I had striped bass for lunch yesterday," said Andrew Garzel, co-owner of Sweet's. "It was delicious. I'm going to have more. Our bass come from Provincetown, Mass., and what happens in the Hudson doesn't affect the fish we serve here."

However, there was some indication that what happens in the Hudson, a major spawning area for many fish, does affect Provincetown.

Henry Carreiro, a vice president of the Striped Bass Fund and a resident of Martha's Vineyard said that some striped bass tagged in the Hudson had been caught in Massachusetts water.

Rod Vandivert, executive director of the fund, which fosters research to protect striped bass fisheries, said the government had to embark on a "crash program" to collect data on bass in the Northeast as quickly as possible. "If this isn't done," he said, "today's announcement will clearly affect the entire coastal economy."

In Washington, the office of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, sent telegrams to the Federal Environmental Protection Administrator, Russell Train, and to John McGlennon, the Federal agency's regional administrator in Boston, urging quick action "to determine the implications for the entire coastal region."

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Officials of the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington plan to meet with other government agency representatives in the capital on Monday and Tuesday. Mary Murtagh, one of Senator Kennedy's aides, said she would attend the Tuesday meeting.

PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, has been in use since 1930. Until 1970, it was widely used in the manufacture of plastics, paints electrical capacitors and transformers, printing ink, caulking compounds and hydraulic fluids.

Japanese Deaths Cited

A spokesman for the Monsanto Chemical Company, the only maker of PCB in this country, said yesterday that for the last five years Monsanto had limited sales to the manufacturers of capacitors and transformers. This is considered a "closed use" and more easy to control.

The current furor over PCB came to light after Mr. Reid had been advised by his aides and a Federal report that fish caught in the Hudson near two General Electric plants 50 miles north of Albany contained extremely high levels of PCB.

The plants have a Federal permit to discharge PCB into the river, but have reduced the amount this year. Further checks showed that fish 100 miles downriver and just up-river of the General Electric plants also contained the substance.

It is not clear just what man's tolerance is to PCB that is ingested over a long period of time. In Japan, large doses of PCB in rice oil were blamed for the deaths of 16 persons in 1968, and for two stillbirths of nine pregnancies. At the University of Wisconsin, Dr. James Allen found that five parts per million of PCB in the rhesus monkey caused massive reproductive failures. The substance also causes skin pigmentation changes and liver damage if taken in sufficient quantity, according to laboratory tests with animals.

Mr. Reid has ordered the monitoring of water quality in drinking supplies in the state. John Geib, city manager of Poughkeepsie, which uses the Hudson as a source of drinking water, said that his city had tested for chlorinated hydrocarbons such as PCB several months ago and had been advised by O'Brien and Gere, consulting engineers of Syracuse, that such substances in the Poughkeepsie water supply were well below the danger levels set by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency.

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The Natural Resources Defense Council issued a statement yesterday accusing Federal officials of laxity in not bringing the full weight of their authority to bear on the issue before this.

Spokesmen for the Environmental Protection Agency insist they do not have the power to ban the use of PCB and that they are trying to get companies such as General Electric to reduce river pollution voluntarily. The council has two separate lawsuits pending to force the Federal agency to take more vigorous action.

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