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Lake Pepin Is Dying, Boundary Group Claims

Lake Pepin is dying, and little is being done to save it. This was the central concern of the July executive committee meeting of the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC)

Recently, the lake was closed to commercial fishing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration because of high levels of the industrial additive polychlorinated biphenyls, of PCBs, found in fish samples. This additive, according to Norman Kirschbaum of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, who met with the committee, is known to cause skin problems, birth defects, and even death. The level in the tainted fish from Lake Pepin was in excess of federal and state health limits. Kirschbaum admitted that not enough is presently known about PCBs either to be sure that the limit of five parts per million is sufficient to ensure public health, or to hold that it is unrealistically restrictive.

PDBs are used in a wide range of manufactured products, all the way from automotive lubricants to agricultural fertilizer containers. When released to the environment, they act somewhat like DDT; in fact, until recently, laboratory tests did not distinguish the two. They both remain in the food cycle for years without degrading to safe levels. However, Kirschbaum noted, PCBs are much more wide-spread than DDT, appearing in municipal and industrial sewage, in the air, in water supplies, and in food products.

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