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Lake fish still full of toxic PCB

By Marian Draeger

High levels of toxic PCB, an industrial chemical similar to DDT, are continuing to turn up in Lake Michigan fish.

The sole American producer of PCB, Monsanto Chemical Co., has cut its production drastically since 1971.

But Robert Reinert, a researcher with the Great Lakes Fishery Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Mich., says there is no sign of a drop-off in PCB concentrations in fish.

"THE REAL problem with PCB is that the levels are not going down," Reinert told a Lake Michigan Day conference sponsored by the Lake Michigan Federation.

Reinert traced a steady decline in DDT levels in Lake Michigan chubs, coho salmon and lake trout since the pesticide was banned in surrounding states in 1970.

But his samples showed almost identical levels of PCB in chubs and increasing levels in coho and lake trout in the last couple of years.

Monsanto has cut its annual production of PCB by half to 40 million pounds a year in the past three years. It also reduced its thousands of customers to less than 50 large customers, which use it to make closed electrical transformer systems.

REINERT SAID some PCB uses may be unknown and certain industries may be importing PCB, (technically polychlorinated biphenyls from other countries.

"I do feel the PCB problem can be settled," said Reinert. "But it will take a lot of work and money. The history of DDT convinces me we will see a drop of PCBs in time."

Reinert says that PCB is "something we should be concerned about" because fish food with high PCB levels caused mink to die or not reproduce.