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Fish Caught Near Knoxville Contain Toxins, Says Study

KNOXVILLE (UPI) — Fish caught in the Tennessee River near Knoxville last summer contained toxic levels of cancer-causing PCBs, a new state study says.

The state Water Quality Control Division report marks the third time in the past nine years that high levels of PCBs have turned up in catfish and carp from the river. But officials said more studies are needed before the state Health Department decides whether to warn people about the fish.

"THAT'S A real problem," said Danny Scott, a biologist with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

"We don't know whether we're supposed to tell people, 'You can't eat the fish,' or say 'These fish may be hazardous to your health.'"

PCBs are polychlorinated biphenols, a highly toxic chemical linked to cancer, skin and liver diseases in laboratory animals.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned manufacture of the chemical in the late 1970s, but its use by industries as a coolant in electric transformers still is widespread.

PCBs have been found in sediment on the river's bottom, said Larry Clark of TVA's water quality branch which analyzed the fish.

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