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PCA staff ask ban on chemical linked to cancer in humans

The water quality staff of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) has recommended that a type of chemical that may cause cancer in humans be banned.

In a recommendation to the PCA board released Friday, the staff asked for support of a ban on the sale and use of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), chemicals similar in composition to the insecticide DDT. PCBs are used in the production of many plastic products and are discharged as waste in air and water.

PCBs have been discovered in levels of 6 to 18 parts per million in some fish in Lake Pepin. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration limit for human consumption is 5 parts per million.

Because of the high levels of PCBs, commercial fishing in Lake Pepin has temporarily been stopped and the state health commissioner has advised that no more than one meal of fish from Lake Pepin per week should be eaten.

An interagency task force on PCBs, including the PCA and state agencies from both Wisconsin and Minnesota, is now sampling fish, water and sediment from 14 points on the Mississippi River and its tributaries to determine the extent of PCBs and possible sources.

The staff report said the Great Lakes Fishery Laboratory "has determined that Lake Superior lake trout collected near Isle Royale are showing a pattern of elevated PCB residues."

The staff recommendation will be presented to the PCA board at its regular meeting Tuesday. If adopted, it will be sent to Congressional committees for action.

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