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JUL 17 1975

Lake Superior fish contain toxic chemicals

DULUTH, Minn. (AP) — Duluth scientists say they have found toxic industrial chemicals called PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in 26 kinds of fish taken from Lake Superior.

The scientists, conducting a survey for the Lake Superior Basin Study Center, said the chemicals were discovered in most of the marine life varieties found in the lake during a three-week tour last month.

Wayland R. Swain, center director, released the preliminary findings Wednesday.

Swain said all fish taken as samples contained PCBs, but few of the fish contained levels of the chemical high enough to be considered immediately alarming.

The types of fish containing the highest chemical levels are generally not consumed directly by humans, but are part of the lake's food chain, Swain said.

Cisowet trout, an oily deep water fish taken from the trough between Grand Portage and Isle Royale, contained the highest level of PCBs, he said.

The trout contained between 0.2 and 8.4 parts per million (ppm) of the chemicals, far below the levels found recently in trout from Lake Michigan and carp from Lake Pepin, a widening in the Mississippi River along the Minnesota-Wisconsin border between Red Wing and Wabasha.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has established a safe level of 5 ppm for PCBs, which are known to cause birth defects in fish, birds and mammals.

PCBs are used in industrial products such as plastics, printers' ink, hydraulic fluid and electrical insulators.

The Duluth scientists also are attempting to determine the source of the chemicals.

The study is being made in cooperation with the Michigan and Minnesota departments of natural resources and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the International Joint Commission are sponsoring the project.

MONS 031097