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Michigan PCB ban eyed

LANSING (AP) — The state Department of Natural Resources may seek a legislative ban on a chemical contaminant officials say is turning up at "alarming levels" in Lake Michigan fish.

The chemical is polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) used in household products from hand-soap to paper.

"If the Environmental Protection Agency is not in a position to act nationally, we may have to go to the legislature and effect a ban on PCBs in any product," said William Turney, chief of the bureau of water management at the DNR.

Turney said the EPA may not be able to act because of statutory liminations on its authority.

Turney did not rule out the possibility products containing PCB could be allowed while meeting federal regulations.

PCBs appeared at such high levels in Lake Michigan fish earlier this year, the U.S. food and Drug Administration seized some shipments of chubs. The agency said PCB levels were "dangerously high."

FDA limits are five parts per million, but some of the chubs had as much as 20 parts per million.

Potentially harmful to humans are levels of 500 parts per million.

Turney told the Natural Resources Commission in a report Thursday the situation is "alarming" because PCB levels have remained the same or increased since 1970, rather than decreasing as predicted.

The level of most other contaminants has decreased, Turney said.

"In 1970, we felt we had things under control," he said. "We buttoned up all the major discharges of PCBs."

At that time, PCB was used mainly by industry. The sole U. S. manufacturer of the product, Monsanto Chemical Company of St. Louis, agreed to stop producing the chemical for certain industrial uses which led to contamination.

"There were 39 industries reporting use of PCBs in Michigan last year," said Turney, "a whole lot more than previously. When we followed it up we found PCBs showing up in all kinds of things."

Dow Chemical Company's Michigan division "is not using PCB in any of our manufacturing processes," said manager of public relations Thomas D. Sinclair.

The division does have electrical transformers that contain PCB as a heat resistant insulator — the use that makes PCB a widespread chemical. The division has diked transformers to contain spills, Sinclair said.

PCBs are chemically associated with DDT. When PCBs was first unmasked as a contaminant in 1969 it was found in concentrations of up to 2.9 parts per million in catfish in the Saginaw Bay area.

In the past few years DDT and mercury in Michigan fish have declined, making the PCB problem more significant, said Turney. Recent data shows PCB is "very toxic," he noted.

Tests on Rhesus monkeys at the University of Wisconsin showed the animals were "sensitive" to PCBs at levels below the FDA limits.

But Turney emphasized, "that data is not validated and it doesn't mean that humans are sensitive at that level or anything like that."

The Lake Michigan Toxic Material Committee found herring gulls which ate fish from Lake Michigan with high PCB levels died in "significant numbers because of PCBs. We feel there is a definite correlation."

A year ago, the DNR's planting of young pike in various streams resulted in "almost 100 per cent mortality," said Turney, who linked the proolem to PCB. He said certain selection sites, most in Western Michigan, were abandoned.

In 1970, some mink ranchers fed their animals salmon contaminated with PCB and had trouble keeping young animals

Dow official asks Congress for more energy flexibility

WASHINGTON — The free marketplace can better shift industry from shortage-prone energy sources to abundant ones, a Dow Chemical Company official testified Thursday before the Senate public works committee.

Gerald L. Decker, Dow Corporate energy manager and co-director of the Commerce Department's technical panel on Project Independence, urged senators to allow industry the flexibility to accomplish it.

Decker asked that industry be given the latitude to change energy sources as economics, supply and need dictate.

The country cannot become a successful coal-using nation through punitive legislation Decker maintained.

Needed Congressional action are:

—Measures to stimulate the production of coal.

—Economic incentives for industry to convert to or to install coal - fired facilities, in the form of tax credits or others.

—Immediate deregulation of oil and natural gas prices to allow energy sources to seek relative values.

Profit considerations will determine effective energy use if Congress assumed that approach, Decker said. He cited three Dow locations at which the company plans to alternatives of geothermal, nuclear, lignite and stale oil energy.

In Texas, "we are moving away from natural gas to fuel oil, and are preparing to move to lignite," a low-grade coal.

In Midland, Dow determined 10 years ago to pursue nuclear power as an alternative to cheap energy in Texas and Louisana.

Delayed for reasons, Decker did not enumerate, Midland's nuclear plant "is a classic case study of the difficulty of moving toward nuclear power in this country," Decker said.

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Extended outlook
Lower Peninsula--Chance showers Sunday and Mon-
Partly cloudy Tuesday.
·per 40s to upper
70s.
·ula--Chance
Sunday
·s in

today

Business	p4 - s2
Classified	p5-7 - s2
Comics	p4 - s2
Editorial	p6 - s1
Entertainment	p10 - s1
Family	p4-5 - s1
Local news	p3 - s1
Obituaries	p7 - s1
Outdoors	p3 - s2
Sports	p1-2 - s2
Today's digest	p2 - s1

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