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Chemicals above acceptable amounts

By JUDY JOHNSON
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Food and Drug Administration analyses in May and June showed catfish from Choccolocco Creek with more than 50 times the acceptable level of a chemical substance and carp from Logan Martin Lake with almost eight times the acceptable amount of the same material.

Tests for chlorinated hydrocarbons polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were run on a small quantity of fish, some of which were collected from commercial fishermen on Logan Martin Lake and at the mouth of Choccolocco Creek. Chlorinated hydrocarbons include DDT and its breakdown products. Dieldrin, another controversial pesticide, also was tested for.

THE FEDERAL Water Quality Administration and the FDA have set 5 parts per million as the acceptable tolerance level for either chlorinated hydrocarbons or PCBs in the flesh of fish.

Catfish samples from Choccolocco tested as high as 277 parts per million of PCBs, according to A. W. Granade of the Atlanta FDA laboratory. He said a carp sample from Logan Martin showed 39.6 parts per million.

The survey was run in preparation for a future closer FDA look at levels of various impurities in the flesh of fish in Alabama streams.

The question of whether PCBs are dangerous to human health is still in dispute.

PCBs ARE manufactured in the United States only at the Monsanto plant in Anniston and another in Illinois.

Gene L. Jessee, local Monsanto plant manager, said: "It's the main product." It is produced year-round, while some better-known products like parathion are not.

The fluid is chemically inert, inflammable and has excellent electrical properties. It has been manufactured for 35 years as a safety fluid for electrical equipment.

Granade said there is no doubt the level of PCBs in the samples exceed the administrative guidelines set by the FDA as to tolerance levels. And, he said, there are cases of pesticide residues which also exceed these levels.

JOE CROCKETT of the Alabama Water Improvement Board said no action is planned at present as a result of the findings. "I can't say that they would necessarily require action," Crockett said. "The value of PCB is something that in my opinion has yet to be decided. . ."

The whole matter of PCBs is still subject to study and investigation, Crockett said.

The manufacturing source of PCBs is the Monsanto plant at Anniston. Any other sources would be minor and accidental. PCBs are used in a closed cletrical systems such as transformers.

ACCORDING to Jessee, several steps have already been taken to halt any flow of PCBs in the effluent from the plant, and research is underway to determine the best methods of monitoring PCBs and halting the flow permanently.

"We've just scratched the surface on know-how about the product," Jessee said ". . .we wanted to develop qualitative and quanitative expertise. It has been a slow process because of the ability to identify the materials and the lack of sophisticated analysis equipment. . ."

In the past several months, Jessee said, Monsanto has developed the methodology, trained the people and obtained the equipment needed to start some analysis work "to mo ourselves." There are seven technical people wor full-time on the problem, said.

". . .we have done t things we found impor first," Jessee said. "We n sure no major quantities PCBs leave the plant. We spent $300,000 in the last months to do this. . ."

JESSEE emphasizes t Monsanto's work of defining problem and coming up the methods of tackling "in its infancy."

The plant manager s Monsanto is aware of the re FDA test results, although

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