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Possible Cancer Hazard Found In Lake Ontario Gulls

The Canadian Wildlife Service reports a group of cancer-causing pollutants have been found for the first time in wildlife--in herring gulls that live on Lake Ontario. The chemicals found are polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, commonly called PAHs. They are released into the lake in the processing and use of petrochemicals and the burning of coal.

Wildlife officials say that while no pure cancer cases have been reported in the gulls, several birth defects have been noted. For example, some gulls with PAHs in fat tissues had offspring with crossed beaks and splayed legs. The gulls were also reported to have been carrying other compounds, including DDT, dieldrin and polychlorinate biphyeyls (PCBs.) Officials believe the presence of PAHs in the gulls could be a major potential hazard for human health. Scientists theorize the gulls injested the PAHs from eating a fish species carrying the carcinogenic pollutant. Wildlife officials suspect some of the fish carrying the chemicals include the perch, alewives and coho salmon. These same fish are frequently caught in Lake Ontario and consumed by humans.

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