Warnings don't stop striped-bass eaters

By EDWARD KULIK

Blase Long Islanders, inured to health hazards in cigarets, smog, potholes and pesticides, are still smoking, breathing, driving — and eating striped bass.

Despite the recent well-published report of a high concentration of a toxic chemical found in striped bass taken from the Hudson River, a spot check of seafood restaurants and fish wholesalers on Long Island indicates there has been no drop-off in orders for striped bass.

The report came from Ogden R. Reid, state commissioner of the Environmental Conservation Department, who said high levels of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) had been found in fish caught in the Hudson River about 50 miles north of Albany and near two General Electric power plants.

According to the report, PCB was widely used until 1970 in the manufacture of plastics, paints, generating equipment, printing ink, caulking compounds and hydraulic fluids. According to Monsanto Chemical Company, the only manufacturer of PCB in this country, sales were limited five years ago to manufacturers of capacitors and transformers.

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THE GENERAL ELECTRIC plants have a federal permit to discharge PCB into the river but voluntarily reduced the amount of discharge this year.

The long-range effects of human ingestion of PCB are not clear. There are reports of Japanese deaths resulting from eating large doses of PCB in rice oil, and a report by Dr. James Allen of the University of Wisconsin that ingestion of five parts per million of PCB caused "massive" reproductive failures in rhesus monkeys and changes in pigmentation and some liver damage in tests with other animals.

Some doubt as to the seriousness of the PCB threat in striped bass has also been created by a report that Poughkeepsie, which uses the Hudson River as a source of drinking water, had tested the river for such substances several months ago and was informed by its consulting engineers that the levels were well below the danger mark set by the U.S. Environment Protection Agency.

If the toxicity threat proves real, however, it could significantly affect the economic picture for the entire northeast coastal area. Studies made a few years ago indicated that practically all of the striped bass found in these waters are spawned in the Hudson River, not in Chesapeake Bay as had long been believed.

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REID HAS advised against the eating of fish taken from the Hudson River pending several tests and studies to be made by his department and others.

Among the steps his department is taking, he said, was a statewide monitoring program of all major waterways, including the Hudson River and Long Island Sound, and the sampling of fish in commercial markets.

Meanwhile, a Press spot check of restaurants in Queens, Nassau and Suffolk showed no change either in orders for striped bass from restaurant patrons or in wholesale orders to suppliers.

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THE SEASCAPE RESTAURANT in Islip and Gil Clark's in Bay Shore reported no change in striped bass orders. William Claudio of Claudio's Restaurant in Greenport reported a similar lack of effect, but added that the fish itself seemed in short supply.

"People around here have been eating stripers for more than 150 years. It's not likely that there will be much change based only on what we know now."

Don's Yankee Clipper in Freeport said they were selling the same amount and could discern no reaction on the reports from their patrons.

Chelsea House in Howard Beach, Fisherman's Cove in Bayside and Scott's Seafood House in Rego Park all said they had noticed no drop-off in orders for striped bass.

College Point Seafood Distributors, a wholesaler, said there had been no drop in restaurant orders for the tasty fish, adding that their striped bass came from Chesapeake Bay, not the Hudson.

State Commissioner of Health Robert P. Whalen said: "There is no public health emergency, and we do not believe that medical attention is warranted at this time for persons having consumed Hudson River fish in moderation . . . Until further information is available striped bass should be avoided."

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