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Two Quinnipiac River posts added for PCB monitoring

By Thomas C. JACKSON
HARTFORD — Two Quinnipiac River posts are part of an expanded statewide monitoring program analyzing the sources and impact of polychlorinated biphenyl or PCB pollution in Connecticut.

Created to study PCB levels in human sediment and fish samples, the new state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) drew "all told tests of Hartford's Park River, the Quinnipiac near Meriden, Salt River near Danbury, Connecticut River, upper Housatonic River, Lake Lillinonah, Naugatuc River and Stamford Harbor in initiating examination sites.

Once widely used in industry as well as consumer products, PCB is a toxic chemical which circulates in the environment for decades. Chemically similar to DDT, PCB is known to cause skin disorders and reproductive failures in humans. Federal researchers say the long lasting pollutant has caused liver cancer in laboratory animals.

The state studies announced Tuesday will be coordinated with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) efforts, a DEP spokesman said. EPA scientists are currently checking Bridgeport Hydraulic Company wells and reservoir for possible PCB contamination.

The federal envirog agency is also monitoring wildlife, including shorebirds and industries around New England to evaluate potential PCB sources. Some officials believe significant amounts of PCBs are entering the environment from these disposal sites.

"Based on the studies, a monitoring and management program we will determine whether any additional limitations are necessary to protect PCBs from entering our waters," DEP Commissioner Joseph Gill said Tuesday.

Expansion of the state monitoring network is based on probe whether PCB levels found in humans need to be linked to contamination of fish and other wildlife, a DEP official said.

"We have found PCBs in various areas of Maine and will initially concentrate on those areas in which higher PCB levels are found," DEP Water Compliance and Biomonitoring Unit Director Chief Justice Taylor said.

"Our purpose is to see where the greatest areas are where levels are if there is a correlation between concentrations found in the sediments and fish that live there," he added.

"We will also try to identify and ultimately pinpoint sources of PCBs," he said. But a lot of what is seen today may be residues from PCBs dumped in sediment before use of the chemical was limited in 1971, he said.

Measurable levels of PCBs have been found in twelve Connecticut wildlife since 1969. Tests of striped bass from Long Island Sound, for instance, have consistently yielded .25 parts per million (ppm) of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration maximum contamination level for fish.

Similar of PCBs in fish and waterfowl have the DEP claimed, considered safe by the FDA's 5 ppm limit for fish and poultry fit for human consumption.

The most current PCB results showed 2 ppm PCBs in fish taken from the Atlantic Ocean mouth. While this level is well below the FDA limit, some state officials were concerned that PCB contamination could be found in the supposedly "clean" area of Maine.

The FDA limit is being reconsidered in the wake of Canadian action ending a temporary 5 ppm maximum for fish to be eaten by humans.

The DEP program will test other trout and shellfish as well as trout from many streams in the Park, Quinnipiac and Salt rivers. Fish samples will come from the upper Housatonic, Quinnipiac and Park rivers and Lake Lillinonah.

Salt water fish taken from the Pilmatic and Stamford Harbor will also be tested.

While the Universal Manufacturing Company in Bridgeport is the only known PCB user in Connecticut today, the state pollutant has been found in such varied locations as the upper Quinnipiac River and Hartford's Broad Brook reservoir.

PCBs are used as an insulating fluid in electric transformers and capacitors. The only licensed PCB discharger in Connecticut is from a General Electric plant in Pittsfield, Mass. which dumps a quarter pound of the waste into the Quinnipiac River each day.

One of PCBs were unrelated in 1972 when the health effects of PCBs became evident by the Monsanto Company. The lone American producer of this chemical, Monsanto had decided to phase out manufacture of the substance as soon as possible.

PCBs are blamed for a wave of illness which swept some 1,200 Japanese after the pollutant dripped into rice oil at a food processing plant. High PCB levels in the rice oil led to miscarriages, skin lesions and still birth.

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