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Toxic levels found in striped bass

Two fish samples from Connecticut coastal waters, including the mouth of the Connecticut River, have revealed dangerous levels of a toxic chemical substance known as PCB.

Edible portions of six striped bass taken from the Connecticut River mouth were ground together and a PCB level of 5.1 parts per million parts of fish flesh was found, said David Wiggin, director of the environmental health division of the state Department of Health.

The federal safety standard is five parts per million for the toxic industrial chemical, (polychlorinated biphenyl), used as insulation for electrical components.

Of 12 samples, only specimens taken from the Connecticut River and Black Rock Harbor, between Fairfield and Bridgeport, were over federal standards, Wiggin said. The Black Rock Harbor sample was measured at 5.7 parts per million.

The findings allayed fears that PCB levels might be high in western Long Island Sound because striped bass that spawn in the PCB-polluted Hudson River travel there, Wiggin said. "I'm not saying we're happy (about the findings), but it is correct to say that it is safe to eat the fish. But I think we need to do more tests," he said.

PCBs have been linked to skin ailments and reproductive problems in humans, Wiggin said. The long-term effects are unknown, he said.

Others within standard

PCB levels in 10 other samples taken from various locations in Long Island Sound were well within federal safety standards, the Health Department reported. A fish taken from the Niantic River was found to have two parts per million of PCB. PCB levels in the Housatonic River near Pittsfield, Mass. have been as high as 34 parts per million, Wiggin said.

A monitoring program of PCB levels around the state by the Health Department and the Department of Environmental Protection will continue, officials said.

High levels of PCB were recently discovered in the Hudson River in New York where two General Electric plants are located north of Albany. New York officials banned most commercial fishing on the river last week and are reportedly considering further fishing restrictions.

The Monsanto Corp. of Illinois is the only domestic producer of PCB, Wiggin said, and has severely curtailed its usage.

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