MONS 031171

THE JOURNAL-TIMES
RACINE, WIS.
(e) 41,700 (S) 42,400

JUN 15 1975

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DNR repeats warning about fish

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), again has warned people to limit their consumption of large trout and salmon from Lake Michigan, and other fish from the Upper Mississippi River and the Fox River near Portage.

Fish in these waters contain more than the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's acceptable level of PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls).

The FDA has set the public health action level for market fish at 5 parts per million (ppm) of PCB. Recognizing that some larger fish in these waters contain more than 5 ppm, the Wisconsin Division of Health recommends that, "sports fishermen be advised to refrain from eating more than one meal per week of such fish and that pregnant women and children be cautioned to limit their intake to one average size serving of such fish per week."

Fish from the following waters have been found to exceed these levels:

1. Lake Michigan and Green Bay trout and salmon, including lake trout, coho salmon, chinook salmon, and brown trout, over 24 inches in length.

2. Many fish in the Mississippi River between Prescott and Lower Lake Pepin.

3. Many fish in the Fox River from Portage north to the Columbia County line.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture said it will seize any fish offered for commercial sale containing more than 5 ppm of PCB. Lake trout over 24 inches long caught by commercial fishermen in Lake Michigan incidental to their netting operations for other species will no longer be sold for human consumption. The DNR will provide the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture with samples of these fish for testing and reulatory action.

A surveillance program to identify and abate sources of PCB discharge will be continued by the DNR along with its fish monitoring program. Fish from Lake Michigan and Green Bay, the Upper Mississippi River, the Fox River downstream from Portage and other waters will be monitored for PCB by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The DNR will also request authorization from the Natural Resources Board to hold hearings to investigate the sale, use, and distribution of PCB along with the necessity of regulating or banning the discharge of PCB into the environment.

The problem of PCB is not unique to Wisconsin, but also involves waters of Minnesota and Michigan. Several weeks ago the U.S. Food and Drug Administration ordered 20,000 pounds of carp fillets buried after they were found to contain concentrations of as much as 14 parts per million of PCB. Subsequently, the Minnesota Department of Health advised sport fishermen that it would be prudent to limit their intake to no more than one meal of fish per week of those fish taken from the Mississippi River between Minneapolis and Lower Lake Pepin.

PCB was not discovered in the environment until 1966 in Sweden and the Wisconsin DNR has conducted studies of PCB since 1968. A warning was issued in 1971 concerning limiting consumption of Lake Michigan and Upper Mississippi River fish because of high PCB levels.

PCB has been used in coolant-insulation fluids in some transformers and capacitors, heat transfer agents, machine tool cutting oils, hydraulic fluids, electrical wiring insulation, and epoxy paints. They also occur in sewage treatment plant and some pulp and paper mill effluents. They may enter the air through vaporization or incineration, or enter the water via fallout or runoff.

Like DDT, PCB is fat soluble with a low solubility in water and therefore is concentrated in the fat of animals, and particularly fish. It also is very stable and tends to persist in the environment.