Commercial Carp Fishing On Pepin Halted After FDA Order

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The Food and Drug Administration has banned the interstate sale of carp from Lake Pepin, due to high levels of PCB, an industrial pollutant.

As a result, commercial fishing on Lake Pepin has stopped and the principal processor, the Lake Pepin Fishery, Pepin, Wis., has halted operations. This has affected about 30 persons involved in the industry, including several commercial fishermen who fish to supplement their retirement incomes.

It will also have a bearing on sport fishing in the lake in that commercial carp fishing has kept the numbers of the unpopular carp under control. The bottom-feeding carp cause problems for game fish.

While it is probable that PCB levels may be found to be above limits in some game fish, too, the relatively small consumption is not expected to be a health hazard, according to researchers.

PCBs — polyclorinated biphenols — are a persistent type of chemicals that have been shown to cause tumors, and the permissable level has been set at not more than 5 parts per million (ppm).

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been monitoring PCB levels on Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, and about a month ago found excessive PCB levels in Lake Michigan fish.

As a result, a similar check was made on Lake Pepin two weeks ago, where carp were found to have from 6 to 14 parts per million, well above the 5 ppm. level set by the FDA.

Henry Roberts, deputy regional director of the FDA in Minneapolis, said the Lake Pepin Fishery owner, Rudolph Hogue, had voluntarily halted the sale of Lake Pepin fish and had returned a

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loaded from New York and destroyed it.

He said the long-term effect of the discovery is presently uncertain, for while the amount of PCBs in the lake has dropped in the past two years, it may be some time before the level in the fish falls back to the 5 ppm. limit.

In part, he said, this is due to the chemical's tendency to be fat so that it accumulates in larger and older fish — the type taken by commercial fishermen.

The problem, he said, is not an irreversible one, although it could be months or even more than a year before acceptable levels could be reached.

The ban on carp is only on those fish caught in Lake Pepin and that part of the Mississippi River upstream to the Twin Cities, Roberts said — the area where the PCB pollution is believed to originate.

The FDA has been discussing the problem with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. There has been a significant reduction in the use of PCBs, Roberts said, with its use in inks, heat transfer fluids and carbonless paper now eliminated.

As for the Lake Pepin Fishery, Hogue said he buys fish from many sources, and may be able to resume operations using fish caught in interior lakes and along the Mississippi below Lake Pepin.

Apparently, fisheries personnel say, the lake, which has traditionally been a settling area for upriver pollution, accumulates the PCBs in the bottom, where it is picked up by the carp, which are a bottom-feeding fish with a wide range of food choices.

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