THE MINNEAPOLIS STAR
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.
A. 253,458
NOV 12 1975 Eve.

PCB pollution not traced to factories

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Industrial plants and sewage-treatment facilities apparently are not significant sources of PCB pollution in the Mississippi River and its tributaries, according to a report released today.

The report does suggest, however, that there are substantial PCB concentrations in the river's bottom sediment, especially in Spring Lake and Lake Pepin.

The report also indicates river dredging activities stir up the bottom sediment, allowing PCBs to mix with the water again.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are a group of toxic industrial chemicals which have been linked to reproductive failure in humans and animals, and also have been linked to certain types of cancer in laboratory animals.

A TASK FORCE involving agencies from Minnesota, Wisconsin and the federal government was organized last spring to study the PCB problem in the Mississippi River after fish with high PCB concentrations were found in Lake Pepin.

Some of the Lake Pepin fish had more than 40 parts per million of PCBs in their flesh, more than 8 times the level considered safe for human consumption.

The interagency task force report released today said there apparently is a direct relationship between PCB concentrations in fish and in bottom sediment.

Spring Lake and Lake Pepin samples contained up to 1,000 parts per billion, while the highest sample taken elsewhere on the river showed fewer than 300 parts per billion.

Samples were taken from Elk River downstream to Alma, Wis.

THE REPORT SAID "the industrial and municipal point sources which were sampled and found to contain PCBs cannot be considered significant sources of PCBs to the Mississippi River and its tributaries."

Only 3 of 34 municipal sewage treatment facilities—at Henderson, Lakeville and Monticello—had PCB concentrations above the .4 parts per billion detection limit. Only 1 of 61 industrial dischargers—the Brown Minneapolis Tank and Fabricating Co.—showed a PCB concentration above the detection limit.

The report tends to support theories by some experts that large quantities of PCBs dumped into the river in past years have settled to the bottom and now are being stirred up by river dredging.

MONS 033476