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BOB EDWARDS: "Despite the passage of the Clean Water Law twelve years ago, industry still dumps chemical waste into the nation's waters with federal permission. In the Great Lakes alone, researchers have measured over eight hundred chemicals in the water and fish. Today, in our third report in a series on pollution in the Great Lakes, NPR's Daniel (Vordling) reports that the chemicals in the Great Lakes could be hurting the fishing industry and consumers who eat the fish."

DANIEL VORDLING: "To find out how toxic chemicals could poison the Great Lakes fishing industry, just visit the Chicago fish house, a huge, brightly lit warehouse in Chicago. Vice-President Fred (Mano) says this is the biggest wholesale fish distribution center in the United States, moving almost a quarter of a million pounds of fresh fish every week, half of it from the Great Lakes."

FRED MANO: "Whitefish is number 1, chub's 2, then Walleye pike followed by Lake Trout."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Workmen at long tables are scaling fat lake trout and pike. Parts are falling to the floor. ( ) are sipping back and forth carrying trays of fish down for restaurants and hotels across the nation.

"But there is a document sitting on a desk in Washington, D.C., that could bring a lot of this multi-million dollar business to a halt.

"The staff of the Food and Drug Administration has concluded that the level of industrial chemicals, PCBs, now allowed in commercially-sold Great Lakes fish, is unsafe, because low levels of PCBs have caused reproductive problems and other health effects in monkeys. So the staff has formally urged the Reagan administration to tighten the standards that spell out just how much PCBs are allowed in fish sold in the market.

"If the FDA Commissioner and the Reagan administration follow the staff's advice, their decision could shatter the $70 million Great Lakes fishing industry, where according to federal researchers, most of the Great Lakes' best-selling fish, whitefish, chubs and trout, are contaminated with more PCBs than the new rules would allow.

"Claude (Verdein), Executive Director of the Midwest Federated Fisheries Council, says that would be a disaster for the twelve

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hundred commercial fishermen on the lakes."

CLAUDE VERDEIN: "I would say that sixty percent of the fishermen would be put out of business."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Sixty percent."

CLAUDE VERDEIN: "Sixty percent."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Where would these fishermen work otherwise?"

CLAUDE VERDEIN: "Most of them would be on welfare, I'm afraid. Some communities depend almost entirely on fishing."

DANIEL VORDLING: "An FDA spokesman says the Commissioner has not decided whether to follow his staff's advice and crack down on PCB-contaminated fish.

"The pending decision reflects the dilemma facing public health officials and fish lovers across the country. Fish from many rivers and lakes, once considered one of nature's most perfect and pristine foods, often contain more toxic chemicals than almost any other foods in the diet. The toxic chemical problem seems to be worse in the Great Lakes, where the fish most affected are the highly coveted Great Lakes salmon and trout.

"Salmon and trout grow to be big fish; ten or fifteen pounds isn't uncommon, and they contain quite a bit of fat. And many of the toxic chemicals are fat soluble; in other words, they dissolve easily in fat. So researcher Lee (Butz), director of Northwestern University's Great Lakes project, says the fish absorb chemicals dumped in the water, almost like a chemical sponge."

LEE BUTZ: "And they may be in very low levels in the water. In fact, it may be impossible to measure them. But as you go up the food chain, at each level there is a higher concentration."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Studies show that when you eat a salmon or trout from Lake Michigan or Lake Huron or Lake Ontario, chances are that the fish contains not just one kind of poison or two, but high levels of at least half a dozen hazardous chemicals: pesticides such as DDT and (toxifene) and chlordane. Industrial compounds such as dioxin. All these in addition to the PCBs.

"But if you ask public health officials how will eating these fish actually affect my health, the answer will frustrate you. They don't know for sure. You heard the same answer during the recent flap over EDB, the pesticide in grains and fruit. Scientists can't predict precisely how humans are affected by chemicals that have been tested only in the laboratory but they do have some clues about poisons in fish that worry them.

"First of all, researchers are worried because a lot of people in the Great Lakes region eat large doses of toxic chemicals because

they eat a lot of chemical-contaminated salmon and trout--not fish they buy but fish they catch.

Now, come on, you might say, how much fish can a person really catch and eat? To find out, just ask sports fishing enthusiasts who gathered recently at Detroit's annual fishing show at the Michigan state fairgrounds colisseum. Conservationist Thomas Washington helped organize the show."

THOMAS WASHINGTON: "Oh, there are people who eat a tremendous amount of fish. It's not uncommon for them to catch a hundred pounds of fish on a weekend. That's very common. Over a year, they might be talking about thousands of pounds of fish."

DANIEL VORDLING: "State officials estimate that two to three million people fish regularly on the Great Lakes. Add to that all the family members who share the catch and that's a lot of contaminated fish in the bodies of Great Lakes region residents. In fact, according to studies by Harold Humphrey, director of epidemiology for the Michigan Public Health Department, people who eat Great Lakes fish only once a week have up to three times as much toxins, such as PCBs, in their blood, as people who don't eat much fish."

HAROLD HUMPHREY: "You eat a fish today, another one tomorrow, another next week and so forth, those contaminants from those fish will stay in your body for most of the rest of your life."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Second, Humphrey can point to studies that show that even low levels of the chemicals commonly found in fish cause serious health problems in laboratory animals--reproductive failure, lung and liver disease and cancer. Now, food industry critics often dismiss such studies. They point out that laboratory researchers usually inject huge doses of the toxins in the animals or force the chemicals into their stomachs through a tube and they say that should hardly make people worry about eating the chemicals in fish.

"Fred Mano of the Chicago fish house."

FRED MANO: "It's just something you learn to live with. It does nothing physically harmful to you. I really think a lot of people make a lot bigger deal out of it than it really is."

DANIEL VORDLING: "So, Katherine Martin of the State University of New York Research Center in Oswego, has taken animal studies another step. She ground up some Great Lakes salmon, the kind millions of fish lovers eat, and she fed them to mice. Along with their regular mouse chow, she fed the mice one fish meal a day fora month and compared them to mice who didn't eat any fish. And Martin found that the fish-eating mice could hardly reproduce."

KATHERINE MARTIN: "The number of young born to the Lake Ontario salmon-fed group, was significantly less than any other group. But you don't even have to analyze the data. You look at the fe-

male, one after the other had zero, zero, zero. No young."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Finally, recent studies suggest that chemical contaminants in fish are dangerous because they're hurting the fish themselves. In lakes and rivers in the Great Lakes region, biologists have recently been finding a surprisingly high incidence of tumors in fish, including tumors of the lip and liver, the kind of cancers usually caused by toxic chemicals.

"Pathologist John (Harshbogger) of the Smithsonian Institution says people should heed the warning."

JOHN HARSHBOGGER: "This is important because it shows that fish are getting these chemicals. They are acting as sentinels to tell us that there are carcinogens in the environment. So, therefore, it's a matter of concern and we should try to see about eliminating these chemicals."

DANIEL VORDLING: "All this evidence has led public health officials in the Great Lakes states to give the public a warning: you should not eat Great Lakes salmon and trout, once considered the most luscious and desirable fresh water fish, more than once per week.

"Studies show that unborn infants and children are especially vulnerable to chemicals passed through their mother's placentas or mother's milk, and so Michigan has added another warning, says Harold Humphrey."

HAROLD HUMPHREY: "Lactating mothers, expectant women, women who anticipate bearing children, and children under age six should not eat these fish."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Not at all. So, are Great Lakes fish eaters giving themselves reproductive ailments or cancer as they sit down for supper? Michigan's Harold Humphrey says that to link chemicals in the fish or chemicals in any food to human health problems will require years of expensive, pains-taking research involving thousands of people."

HAROLD HUMPHREY: "You have to follow the course of the events of an exposed population for probably one generation."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Essentially, if somebody calls you up and says, Dr. Humphrey, tell if all these fish I'm eating are causing some disease."

HAROLD HUMPHREY: "I couldn't tell them for sure and I'd have to say call me back in thirty years."

DANIEL VORDLING: "Harold Humphrey of the Michigan Public Health Department.

"For National Public Radio, I'm Daniel Vordling."