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Industrial Chemical Found in Fish

DULUTH, Minn. (AP) — The presence of toxic industrial chemicals called PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) has been found in 28 kinds of fish, comprising most of the marine life varieties in Lake Superior, according to research being conducted by the Lake Superior Basin Study Center.

The samples of marine life were gathered in a three-week tour of the lake last month by a group of Duluth scientists. Preliminary findings were released Wednesday by Wayland R. Swain, director of the center.

All fish taken as samples showed the presence of PCBs, Swain said, but few of them contained levels of the chemical high enough to be considered immediately alarming.

Fish containing the highest levels of PCBs are generally not consumed directly by humans but some are part of the lake's food chain, he said.

The fish containing the highest level was the Ciscowet trout, an oily deepwater fish taken from the trough between Grand Portage and Isle Royal.

The trout contained from 8.2 to 8.4 parts per million of PCBs. This is far below the levels found recently in trout from Lake Michigan and carp from Minnesota's Lake Pepin, but it is only slightly above the safe level of 5 ppm established by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

PCBs are known to cause birth defects in fish, birds and mammals. Some scientists believe PCBs can cause cancer in humans.

PCBs are used in such industrial products as plastics, printers ink, hydraulic fluid and electrical insulators.

Swain said identifying the sources of the chemicals was one of the main reasons for conducting the study.

The study is being made in cooperation with the Michigan and Minnesota departments of natural resources and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment. The project is sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the International Joint Commission.

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