PCBs Found In State Eels, Carp

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HARRISBURG (UPI) — The Department of Environmental Resources said Monday relatively high levels of toxic chemicals known as PCB's have been found in carp and eels taken from the Schuylkill River.

DER and Fish Commission officials said the PCB levels were higher than the health limits set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Richard Boardman, of DER's Bureau of Water Quality, said nobody should "make a steady diet" of fish from the Schuylkill, but that there was no reason to stop eating the fish altogether.

At the same time, the state agencies said tests on fish flesh showed that PCB's are widespread in low concentrations throughout the state, although the chemicals are not manufactured here.

Out of 120 samples of fish taken from 62 sampling stations in 37 Pennsylvania streams and rivers, 79 showed concentrations of PCB's, Boardman said.

Seventy-two of the samples showed PCB concentrations of less than half the FDA's health limit of five parts per million, he said.

Three samples taken from the Schuylkill were above the FDA standards, Boardman said. These were in an eel (5.7 ppm) and a carp (7.5 ppm) taken downstream from Reading and in an eel (6.1 ppm) taken downstream from Douglasville.

The study also identified three other PCB "hot spots" where the levels were below the FDA limits but still high enough to cause concern, Boardman said.

Two of the hot spots were on the Delaware River near Philadelphia and Yardley

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where eel samples showed concentrations of 2.4 ppm and 3.8 ppm respectively.

The other was in Chartiers Creek downstream from Canonsburg, Washington County, where fish samples showed PCB concentrations of 4.4 ppm.

Boardman said tests for 19 other persistant chlorinated hydrocarbon compounds known to concentrate in fish flesh were run on the 120 samples.

The only chemicals detected where pesticides known as DDT, DDE, DDD, endrin and dieldrin and only one sample showed concentrations higher than the FDA health limit of five ppm, he said.

This was an eel taken from the Delaware River at Philadelphia which showed a concentration of 11.7 ppm of DDT-type compounds.

"We were pleasantly surprised by the results of the tests for PCB's and the other compounds," Boardman said.

"We had expected to find PCB's throughout the state but we didn't find them at the higher levels we expected to find."

Boardman said DER would conduct more detailed investigations on fish from the Schuylkill, lower Delaware and Chartiers Creek to isolate and identify the sources of contamination.

PCB's are a family of chlorinated hydrocarbon compounds that are highly stable and very resistent to chemical and biological degredation. They are widely dispersed throughout the environment.

PCB's are used mostly in electrical transformer fluid but have been used in a wide variety of other products. Monsanto Corp., the sole producer of PCB's, has announced it will phase out production of PCB's in the next year.

The chemicals are known to cause tumors in laboratory animals in high concentrations. High level exposure has resulted in skin lesions, visual impairment and disturbances in liver functions in humans.

Little, however, is known about the health effects of low concentrations of PCB's over long periods of time.

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