Fish Facing New Threat

By THOMAS C. JACKSON
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MERIDEN, (AP) — A powerful industrial pollutant threatens to contaminate striped bass caught in Long Island Sound, making the popular sport fish unfit for human consumption.

Measurable amounts of the pollutant have been found in mud taken from Meriden's Broad Brook reservoir, a 1,1 billion gallon lake which provides half the city's drinking water each year.

And New England's sole industrial discharge of this pollutant enters the Housatonic River in Massachusetts and flows through Connecticut to the Sound.

Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Regional Administrator John McGlennon believes the pollutant poses no threat to New England residents and there's no need for New Englanders to stop eating striped bass or any other kind of fish.

Four years after the first warning sign of Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB) contamination appeared, state Department of Environmental Protection officials know little of PCB levels in Connecticut.

In fact, only two samples have been tested for PCB levels since federal wildlife researchers reported finding abnormally high levels of the chemical in Connecticut River osprey in 1971.

Miscarriage, still birth and skin disease are among the serious health effects attributed to high PCB intake in humans. New American studies suggest the potent industrial chemical

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may also have cancer-causing, or carcinogenic, properties.

Recent research reports also suggest PCB's may have harmful effects at levels well below the contamination limit of 5 parts-per-million (ppm) set by the federal Food and Drug Administration in poultry and fish.

"There's no question there are significant levels of PCB's in Long Island Sound," Dr. Robert Risebrough, a University of California at Berkeley professor, said this week. The chemical is widely used in electrical transformers, capacitors and a long list of consumer products.

Four years ago Risebrough found PCB levels ranging from 300 to 1,000 in ospreys and cormorants along the Sound.

Fatty tissue taken from fish along the Connecticut shore ran from 10 to 180 ppm of PCB, he said. "These are moderately high levels," Risebrough added.

Based on conditions across the nation, this scientist believes PCB levels have not decreased in Long Island Sound since his last report. All around America, PCB levels in fish, birds and the environment have refused to decline, he said.

A 1971 paper published by scientists at the federal Patuxent Wildlife Laboratory in Laurel, Md., also reported high PCB levels in Connecticut osprey eggs. Not one of the levels detailed in that study was low enough to meet the FDA's 5 ppm limit.

Despite the published data, Connecticut health and environmental protection officials did not start a PCB testing program until this year.

The first limited monitoring program in Connecticut came after PCB contamination forced New York officials to ban human consumption of Hudson River fish. State Health Department officials here were reportedly concerned tainted fish might migrate from the Hudson and be caught in Long Island Sound.

Working with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), health officials analyzed six striped bass this summer. Fish taken from Westport's Saugatuck River and the Black Rock Harbor of Fairfield contained PCB reading of 4.2 and 5.7 ppm respectively.

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