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Polluting the Delaware

Conservationists, environmentalists and others, concerned about the future of the Delaware River and the effects pollution may have on the population of New Jersey and other states bordering the river, would do well to examine problems experienced elsewhere, too.

Tocks Island, a proposed dam and recreational sites have been in the news, as have oil spills and other contamination.

But the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation warned recently that some striped bass and coho salmon in Lake Ontario and the Hudson River are unfit to eat.

The fish look normal but they have been contaminated with PCB, a chemical similar to the insecticide DDT.

Federal standards say that any food containing more than five parts PCB per million is unsafe. Some fish have been found with 70 times as much.

The chemical, which is used in the manufacture of plastics, printing ink, electrical transformers, caulking compounds and hydraulic fluids, has been banned in England and Canada.

In one incident in Japan, approximately 1,000 people developed a skin disease after using rice oil contaminated with PCB.

There is also evidence that it contributes to birth defects and other health problems.

A spokesman for one company which has been dumping small amounts of the chemical into the Hudson River said it does not intentionally pollute, "but we live in a real world, and it is going to take time to solve the problem."

Industry's problems are real. So is water pollution, and so is the threat to sport fishermen and the small commercial fishing industry on the Hudson River.

PCB has already been blamed in part for the death of commercial fishing on Lake Michigan.

Dumping of industrial waste is controlled by government permit. But a permit to dump dangerous chemicals into lakes and rivers, when you think about it, is much the same as a permit to dump garbage on the sidewalks.

Some better means of disposal must be found or PCB should be banned.

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