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DNR may request ban on chemical contaminant

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state Department of Natural Resources may seek a legislative ban on a chemical contaminant officials say is turning up at "alarming levels" in Lake Michigan fish.

The chemical is polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), used in household products from handsoap to paper.

"If the Environmental Protection Agency is not in a position to act nationally, we may have to go to the legislature and effect a ban on PCBs in any product," said William Turney, chief of the bureau of water management at the DNR.

Turney said the EPA may not be able to act because of statutory limitations on its authority.

PCBs appeared at such high levels in Lake Michigan fish earlier this year the Food and Drug Administration seized some shipments of chubs. The agency said PCB levels were "dangerously high."

FDA limits are five parts per million, but some of the chubs had as much as 20 parts per million. Potentially harmful to humans are levels of 500 parts per million.

Turney told the Natural Resources Commission in a report Thursday the situation is "alarming" because PCB levels have remained the same or increased since 1970, rather than decreasing as predicted.

The level of most other contaminants has decreased, Turney said.

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