

PCB In Bass Causes Little Concern Here

Reports that striped bass from the Hudson River contain dangerous amounts of polychlorinated biphenyl, a toxic chemical more commonly known as PCB, are causing little or no concern among commercial fishermen in the East End, a spot check disclosed this week.

Used in a wide range of manufacturing processes, PCB is banned in Canada and Britain.

After it was found in Hudson River bass and Lake Ontario salmon, Ogden R. Read, New York State Environmental Conservation Commissioner, and Dr. Robert P. Whelan, State Health Commissioner, issued a warning to consumers.

"I don't want to be an alarmist," said Mr. Read, "but this is a question of public health."

He said his advisory role will stay in effect until he is able to determine the scope of the problem. He is fearful it may involve more than striped bass and salmon.

Indicating growing concern that the problem is not just a regional one, officers of the Striped Bass Fund are calling on the federal government to embark on a crash program to collect data on bass in the Northeast as quickly as possible.

The fund fosters research to protect the striped bass fisheries, and its executive director, Rod Vandivert, said, "If this isn't done the announcement will clearly affect the entire coastal economy."

Henry Carreiro, vice president of the fund and S. Martha's Vineyard resident, reported that some striped bass tagged in the Hudson River have been found in Massachusetts waters.

The office of Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) in Washington has asked Russell Train, Federal Environmental Protection Administrator, to take quick action "to determine the implications for the entire coastal region."

Dan Dzanowski, Greenport fisherman and vice president of the Long Island Fishermen's Association, said this week that commercial fishermen in this area are not finding "the demand for striped bass affected by the PCB warning."

He said the influence it may have in the future depends on the outcome of a federal government investigation into the situation.

"A thing like this can be blown out of proportion," he said, recalling the scare created some years ago by an announcement that swordfish were found dangerously impregnated with mercury. Today, he added, little attention is paid to mercury warnings.

"Right now there is nothing really definite," he said. The commercial fishermen, he intimated, will go on fishing striped bass as they have been until a more thorough assessment of the PCB problem is forthcoming.

A survey of others connected with the local fishing industry disclosed an attitude that more definite information is needed before deciding that all striped bass must be classified as unfit for consumption.

The PCB said to be found in Hudson bass and Ontario salmon in amounts unsafe to eat is manufactured in this country exclusively by the Monsanto Chemical Company.

Fish that failed to comply with U.S. standards were taken from the Hudson north of Albany and near two General Electric plants that have dumped PCB into the river.

Federal standards say food with more than five parts per million of PCB is unsafe. Rock bass removed from the water near the GE plants had 350 parts per million, according to federal researchers. Striped bass caught near the Tappan Zee bridge had an average of 5.7 parts per million and one had 37 parts per million.

Robert Paul, a GE community relations official, said, "We don't put PCBs into the river intentionally. But we live in a real world and it is going to take time to solve the problem."

PCB is used in the manufacture of plastics, paints, electrical transformers, printing ink, caulking compounds and hydraulic fluids.

Similar in molecular structure to DDT, it is not readily soluble in water but is highly soluble in fats. Like DDT it is a chlorinated hydrocarbon. The late Rachel Carson sounded a warning on the dangers of chlorinated hydrocarbon back in the early 1960s. Only in the last five years has a broad spectrum of the scientific community begun to warn of the PCB peril.

In 1971 the presence of PCB in Lake Michigan ended its role as a major commercial fishery.

Because the Toxic Substances Control Act has not yet been acted on by Congress, although it has been pending for more than four years, the Federal government lacks the power to emulate Canada and ban PCB.

A release from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation issued soon after the PCB findings says that limited analyses made recently of striped bass taken off Long Island have not shown PCB concentrations over permissible limits. Additional testing is to be done in the Long Island area as part of a statewide sampling program to identify the impact of contamination upon fish in all major water ways, Commissioner Reid said.

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