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NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE USE

Montgomery--Samples of fish and water collected in Weiss reservoir, on the Coosa River, and analyzed for PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls), did not indicate a cause for alarm concerning public health or the fish population, Alabama state officials announced today.

James W. Warr, chief administrative officer, Alabama Water Improvement Commission (AWIC), said investigations to date showed specimens of some species of fish to exceed the 5 parts per million limit for PCB concentrations in the edible portion of fish flesh established by the Food and Drug Administration, but no water samples tested have exceeded currently applicable concentration limits.

Dr. Ira L. Myers, state health officer and chairman of AWIC, said data available do not indicate a problem insofar as human health is concerned.

"Given the current dietary habits of the people of Alabama and the lack of evidence directly linking PCB's with adverse effects on human health, no additional action is warranted at this time," Dr. Myers said.

Based on Dr. Myers' statement, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the agency concerned with fisheries resources, presently has no plans to close Weiss Lake to commercial fishing.

Public interest in the possibility of excessive PCB concentrations in the waters and fish of Weiss Lake has intensified in recent weeks as a result of analyses of water and fish samples from Coosa River waters upstream from the Alabama-Georgia line.

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Warr said Thursday's announcement followed conferences with the State Health Department and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Copies of all data collected by AWIC have been furnished both of these agencies.

He said investigations made by AWIC on Aug. 18-19 and Sept. 7-8 included the collection of numerous fish samples, three water samples, and one sediment sample. While the sediment and water samples were analyzed within a short time, the examination of fish samples consumed a more lengthy period required by the removal and testing of the edible portions of fish, involving the grinding and mixing, or compositing, of portions from two or more fish in order to produce an average concentration value.

"We do not have the capability to do PCB analysis within AWIC, and were dependent on outside support from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Pesticide Laboratory at Auburn to do the testing," Warr explained.

Polychlorinated biphenyl is a chlorinated organic compound similar to DDT and is reported to be carcinogenic to rats.

Warr said fish data collected to date may be grouped into two categories--that applicable to game fish, such as bass, and that applicable to commercial fish or bottom feeders, such as catfish. The pattern of results seems to indicate that the concentrations in game fish are within FDA limits, while the presence of PCB's in the commercial fish often exceed the pertinent limit.

On nine composites of the edible portion of game fish, only two samples exceeded the limit of 5 parts per million. On seven composites of edible portions of commercial fish, five exceeded 5 parts per million.

Possibly more significant, according to Warr, is the data produced as a result of analyses of water samples. Water samples were collected at three locations, as were the fish samples--near the Alabama-Georgia state line, in the vicinity of Cedar Bluff, and above Weiss Dam. None of these samples exceeded the 1 part per billion level currently considered acceptable for

human consumption, and were so low as to approach the lower limits of analytical capability. No official limit for PCB's in drinking water has been established.

Warr said additional data are needed and that AWIC personnel will continue to work closely with representatives of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Environmental Protection Agency, and others in any monitoring efforts needed to better define and quantify the impact of PCB's in the Weiss Lake area.

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