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Mississippi sport fish rate low in PCB levels

MADISON — The Upper Mississippi River Task Force report on Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCB's) has revealed that in the chemicals are present but not in large quantities in most sport fish.

The report describes PCB concentrations found in fillets of fish sampled in the Upper Mississippi river from the Twin Cities metropolitan area to Alma and includes Lake Pepin, the Lower St. Croix river and Lower Minnesota river.

The report describes test results for a total of 163 fish, including walleye, sauger, smallmouth bass, white bass, crappie, catfish, carp, buffalo and sheepshead. The fish were sampled in 14 locations. Tests revealed that fillets having the higher fat content contained more PCB's.

The fish highest in fat content were catfish and carp fillets which averaged 4 per cent fat. White bas averaged almost 3 per cent fat and walleye, sauger, smallmouth bass and crappie averaged less than 1 per cent fat.

More than 20 per cent of the carp fillets from the fish taken in the Upper Mississippi river exceeded 5 parts per million PCB's, the level established as maximum allowable by the United States Food and Drug Administration.

Walleye fillets averaged 1.5 parts per million PCB's. All the sauger, smallmouth bass and crappie fillets averaged less than 1 part per million. Species most likely to approach or exceed the action level were carp, white bass and catfish. The larger of each species usually contained more fat and more PCB's.

The fish were collected this past June and July and were analyzed in laboratories of the Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

The testing indicates, according to the report, that fillets of many species of fish commonly caught by sport fishermen in the Upper Mississippi region are well below the 5 parts per million action level.

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