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Cost of Carelessness

On the assumption that sportsmen eat the fish they catch, the Department of Natural Resources is warning anglers against more than one meal a week of large trout and salmon from Lake Michigan and other fish from the Upper Mississippi River and the Fox River near Portage.

These fish may contain more than the federally established acceptable level of PCBs, chemicals used in a variety of industrial processes and manufactured products. The DNR says they occur also in sewage treatment plant and some pulp and paper mill effluents. PCBs concentrate in the fat of animals, especially fish, and tend to persist in the environment for long periods of time. The DNR, other states and the federal government are trying to track down and halt the sources of PCBs in the water and air because studies indicate that they pose a possible threat of birth defects, at least in animals.

All this shows why it is important to put the burden of proof of harmlessness on those who would introduce new products into the environment without adequate research. It shows why the license fee revenue of sportsmen may properly help finance the environmental protection efforts of government. And it shows, once again, the environmental interdependence of man and his natural habitat.

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