State issues warning on Hudson fish

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By JUDY GRANDE
Staff Writer

The state urged citizens Saturday not to eat fish taken from the Hudson River for sport more than once a week because of contamination by PCBs, polychlorinated byphenyls.

This follows Tuesday's announcement by the state Department of Environmental Conservation of a ban on commercial catches which included striped bass, eel, white perch, catfish and carp.

The state action received support Saturday from David Seymour, president of the Hudson River Fisherman's Association, an organization of environmentalists interested in improving the river's quality. "It was a responsible action but it is a tragedy too for the people who have voted many times for clean water bond issues to no avail," he said.

Seymour, a resident of Garrison, N.Y. was recently appointed by Commissioner Ogden Reid of the conservation department to chair a committee designed to provide options for the commercial fishermen whose livelihoods are endangered by the ban.

The first meeting will be held Monday at 1 p.m. at Marist College, Poughkeepsie.

One option is to have the commercial fisherman continue to use their nets, thus supplying information on the types of fish and levels of contamination to the state, Seymour said. "This could provide a picture of the Hudson River that the state has never endeavored to get."

There is also very little sport fishing activity at this time of year because the water is too cold and fish are not biting, he added. The season will start up again by April.

Infants, young children and pregnant women should not eat any fish from the Hudson River or salmon from Lake Ontario, according to the state Health Planning Commission. In addition, no fish at all should be taken from the area between Fort Edward and the Troy dam.

"This action is justified by the high levels of PCBs found in all species of fish in this reach of the river," the report said. It also said eels should not be taken from any part of the Hudson or Lake Ontario.

The report said that below the Troy dam, sport fishermen could continue to take fish without significant risk as long as they eat it no more than once a week.

A similar once-a-week limit should also be applied to salmon taken from Lake Ontario, the report said.

The report advised citizens not to purchase any fish taken from the Hudson except shad. Earlier this week, Environmental Conservation Commissioner Ogden Reid said he would soon issue orders banning commercial fishing for most species in the Hudson.

PCBs, which are used in the manufacture of electrical components and have entered the Hudson from two General Electric plants, have been blamed for causing illnesses, most notably in an incident in Japan.

But the commission's report to Carey said the scientific evidence about the harm done by PCBs is ambiguous. It noted evidence that the worst problems may have been caused by contaminants mixed with the PCBs, not the PCBs themselves.

Nonetheless, the report said the commission "remains concerned with the long-range health effects of the contamination of our ecosystem with these chemicals."

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