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Unsafe chemical levels found in several fish

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PCB, a trade chemical similar to DDT which was found in Hudson River striped bass several weeks ago, since then has been found in other Hudson River fish in amounts exceeding the limit set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a spokesman for the Environmental Conservation Department said Monday.

Under FDA guidelines, fish containing up to five parts per million of PCB, a chlorinated hydrocarbon used in the manufacture of electrical transformers and a variety of other products, is considered safe to eat.

But a small mouth bass taken recently from the Hudson at Cannonsville contained 13.5 parts per million, a pickerel 8.88 parts per million and several white perch 8.67 to 20.87 parts per million of PCB, the EnCon spokesman said. He said the department's testing is continuing and a full report of its findings will not be available for at least two weeks.

A state Health Department spokesman said Monday there is "no hard information" on the health hazards, if any, involved in eating fish containing PCB.

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But because of the possibility of danger, he said Commissioner Dr. Robert P. Whalen would extend his Aug. 7 warning on the eating of striped bass and other long-lived fish in the Hudson River to cover the kinds of fish involved in the recent testing. In that statement, he urged consumers not to eat fish which have been found to contain PCB above five parts per million and to limit other fish to one serving per week. The original warning included salmon from Lake Ontario as well as striped bass from the Hudson.

The concern over PCB arose early this month after the Federal Environmental Protection Agency discovered through testing that fish taken from the Hudson at Fort Edward and Hudson Falls, where General Electric has two manufacturing plants, had high PCB concentrations. Three rock bass were found to have 200 parts per million and 131 chiner minnows 28 parts per million.

The EnCon spokesman said General Electric is the only known upstate user of PCB, which is made exclusively by the Monsanto Chemical Co. GE has a permit, issued by the EPA Jan. 21, 1975, which requires it to reduce its PCB discharge to 1.5 ounces daily by June 1, 1977.

The spokesman said he "believed" reports that GE discharged 20 pounds of PCB daily in 1974 are correct but added, "I know the discharge has been substantially reduced below that now....down, I think, to around two pounds a day."

The Health Department is now testing water supplies taken from the vicinity of the discharges and its spokesman said any community taking its water from the Hudson will have its water supply tested in the next couple of months.

Contrary to a previous published report, he said PCB can be filtered out of the water supply with the proper equipment.

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