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PCB chemical ban recommended

DULUTH (AP) — The chief of the National Water Quality Laboratory says an interstate task force has recommended a near total national ban on the use of one type of toxic industrial chemical.

Dr. Donald Mount, chairman of the Lake Michigan Toxic Substances Committee, said recent research has established that the chemical — called PCBs — can cause birth defects or prevent reproduction in fish, birds and mammals, and there is some evidence they may have similar effects on humans.

He said the committee, with representatives from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and the federal government, has recommended to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that PCBs be limited to "essential uses."

Mount said he made the recommendation verbally to Francis Mayo, the agency's regional director, at a meeting in Chicago in late May.

Mayo said he has not received a written report from the committee calling for a ban. He said he is not sure the agency has the authority to impose such a ban.

PCBs are a group of chemical compounds used in many industrial processes as a hydraulic fluid, heat transfer fluid, and electrical insulators. It also is found in such products as hand soaps. Monsanto Chemical Company is the only U.S. producer.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has said the PCB levels in Lake Michigan are "alarming" and says it also will push for a ban.