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'Near-Total Ban' on PCB Is Urged

DULUTH, Minn. (UPI) — The Lake Michigan Toxic Substances Committee has recommended a "near-total ban" on the use of a toxic industrial chemical called PCB found in the Great Lakes.

Donald Mount, chief of the National Water Quality Laboratory in Duluth and chairman of the committee, said the interstate group made the recommendation to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The chemical, suspected of damaging human internal organs and causing skin lesions and birth defects and possibly cancer, has been found in Lakes Superior and Michigan and Lake Pepin.

Mount said PCB levels in Lake Michigan trout range up, to 40 parts per million or more. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration standard for human consumption is five parts per million.

Mount said the committee felt it should recommend PCBs be restricted to "essential uses which amounts to a near-total ban."

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has called PCB levels in Lake Michigan "alarming" and says it will urge the chemical be banned.

In Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River between Minnesota and Wisconsin carp have been found with PCB levels up to 40 parts per million and on Lake Superior trout hve been found with up to about 13 parts per million. The State Health Department warned Minnesotans not to eat more than one meal of Lake Pepin fish per week.

Dr. James Allen, University of Wisconsin pathologist, said the chemical can cause birth defects, has altered the menstral cycle of some women, caused some men to lose their sex drive and has affected reproduction of some fish, birds and animals.

"One of the alarming things is that PCBs may not affect us today or tomorrow," Allen said. "It may be 10 or 20 years before we really see effects in humans."

Researchers have found failure in reproduction of birds that eat fish from Lake Michigan and Lake Ontario, plus birth defects like bills that won't close.

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