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Advice to EPA: Limit PCB use

DULUTH, Minn. (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 the committee has recommended to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) be limited to "essential uses." The committee has representatives from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and the federal government.

Dr. James Allen, a University of Wisconsin pathologist, has conducted research which he says establishes that the chemical can cause birth defects or prevent reproduction in fish, birds and mammals. He said there is some evidence they might have similar effects on human beings.

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 handsoaps. Monsanto Chemical Co. 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.

PCBs have been found recently in Minnesota in fish taken from Lake Pepin and Lake Superior.

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