HEW NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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(Food and Drug Administration)
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The Food and Drug Administration today made public the following decisions on polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's):

(1) The Agency has confirmed the problem of PCB contamination and supports the recent New York State action to ban commercial fishing, except for shad, from the Hudson River, and to advise sportsfishermen to restrict their consumption of fish caught in the Hudson and salmon caught in Lake Ontario.

(2) FDA is investigating the extent of the PCB problem in freshwater fish in other areas of the country, and will encourage and support other states in taking action similar to New York's wherever significant problems of fish contaminated with PCB's exist.

(3) While fish shipped intrastate is a State responsibility, the FDA will act against all fish in interstate commerce found to exceed 5 parts per million (ppm) PCB's.

(4) FDA is considering lowering the present tolerance levels for PCB's in fish and other foods as a result of recent studies which indicate that PCB's may be more toxic than previously believed.

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PCB's are a class of toxic industrial chemicals which are widely used in a variety of manufacturing processes and products. Because they are highly stable, and because their industrial applications have, in the past, been largely uncontrolled, PCB's have become a persistent environmental contaminant that in some cases has reached the food supply.

The known toxic effects of PCB's in humans include an acnelike skin eruption, pigmentation of the skin and nails, excessive eye discharge, and swelling of eyelids.

Since FDA first proposed tolerances in 1972, levels of PCB's in the American diet have decreased markedly. The problem of PCB's in freshwater fish remains a concern, however, because of continued industrial discharges of PCB's into lakes and rivers. Most fish intended for human consumption come from salt waters, which have not been found to be contaminated with PCB's.

For several months, FDA has been working with New York to determine the extent of the PCB problem in the Hudson River and Lake Ontario. FDA's evaluation of test results for fish caught in the Hudson River showed that 53 out of 68 samples contained PCB's in excess of the current FDA tolerance level of 5 ppm, with an average PCB level of 31.3 ppm. Samples of salmon taken from Lake Ontario ranged from 2.1 to 24.6 ppm PCB's. Since past analyses of shad had shown low PCB levels, the New York ban does not include shad. FDA has offered to assist New York in monitoring the 1976 Spring run of shad for PCB levels.

FDA recognizes that the contamination of fish with PCB's will persist unless controls are initiated to curtail pollution of the environment with PCB's. Therefore, the full scientific resources of FDA continue to be available to the Environmental Protection Agency to assist that Agency in its efforts to control PCB discharges into the environment.

Today's actions will be published as a formal statement of FDA policy in the FEDERAL REGISTER of February 27, 1976.

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