PCB
Press Clips

Tumors in Duwamish bottom fish raise fears

SEATTLE (AP) — Finding tumors in fish that feed at the bottom of the polluted Duwamish River reinforces health officials' concern that the fish may be dangerous to human health.

A clear health hazard has not been proven, but indications are that the fish could pose a health problem, said Dr. Richard Wade, Seattle and King County director of environmental health.

"Our position has been for a long time that people should not eat bottom fish from the Duwamish. However, we were not aware of tumor-production in fish until the recent study," Wade said Tuesday.

"Whether eating the fish would produce cancer is totally unknown at this time," Wade added.

He said that as a "precaution" bottom fish from the river should not be eaten because the waterway is polluted with raw sewage, organic wastes and industrial spillage, such as the chemical polybrominated biphenyl (PBB).

He said, "We feel there is not suitable information to prohibit the use of the fist, but we are encouraging people not to eat it. We are not aware of any disease produced by fish coming out of the Duwamish," Wade said.

Two marine fisheries experts warned Monday that bottom fish — primarily starry flounder and English sole — caught at the mouth and lower reaches of the Duwamish River should not be eaten. Dr. Bruce McCain of the federal Northwest Fisheries Center and Dr. Bruce Miller of the University of Washington's Fisheries Research Institute say the fish are turning up with tumors.

A recent study in cooperation with University of California teams showed 20 out of 62 bottom fish caught from the Duwamish estuary in Seattle's harbor-industrial area had tumors in the liver.

Scientists have no proof, but they suspect high levels of industrial pollutants called polychlorinated biphenyls — PCBs — could be causing the disease.

"Any connection between the diseased livers and PCBs is still circumstantial," McCain said. "But I would say, in any event, to leave those fish alone. Definitely."

Another scientist for the Marine Fisheries Center, however, said he sees no danger in eating flounder or sole from the Duwamish because diseases cannot be transmitted from cold-blooded animals to warmblooded ones.

"Normal cleaning of the fish will take care of it," said Dr. Maynard Steinberg.

More than 100 gallons of toxic PCB was spilled into the Duwamish in September 1974 and settled to the bottom. Cleanup crews from the Environmental Protection Agency and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers removed most of the contaminants.

But scientists speculate some of the industrial poison may have been present before the spill.

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