PCB - Articles

Milliken Halts Sale of Coho

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Gov. Milliken ordered a halt Wednesday to all commercial sales of coho salmon taken from Great Lakes waters, as state officials continued to seek information about the potential effects of a dangerous chemical compound discovered in some coho near Ludington.

Faced with difficulty in getting answers about the chemical from federal officials, Milliken also asked Elliot Richardson, U.S. secretary of health, education, and welfare, to send a team of experts to Michigan to help the state.

CONCERN OVER the coho arose Tuesday when Milliken announced tests of 100 salmon showed levels of the chemical compound — called PCB, short for polychlorobiphenyl — to be at higher levels than those recommended by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Milliken's order curtailing commercial sales of coho followed his order Tuesday halting the state's annual giveaway program of coho heading upstream to spawn.

As yet, state officials have neither halted sports fishing for coho nor suggested that coho should not be eaten.

In Washington, an FDA official, Lessel Ramsey, said American concern over PCB began to grow in 1968, when 600 persons in Japan suffered skin disease, gastro-intestinal disorders, jaundice, edema and abdominal pain after consuming PCB-contaminated rice oil.

The Japanese affected in 1968 were exposed to PCB levels of from 200 to 2,300 parts per million (ppm) of the compound in rice oil.

So far, the levels found in Michigan coho have averaged only 11 ppm, ranging from six to 17 ppm in fish tested. The FDA safety guideline for human consumption is a maximum of 5 ppm.

George Weeks, Milliken's press secretary, said the governor sought Richardson's help after telephone conversations Wednesday between state officials in Lansing and FDA personnel in Washington failed to provide "anything really conclusive" about the potential dangers of such levels in coho.

MILLIKEN'S ban on commercial sales of coho will mainly affect an annual program under which the state catches spawning salmon and contracts with a processor to handle them. The processor gets two million pounds of salmon, keeps 300,000 pounds for the annual sportsman giveaway program, and sells 1.7 million pounds commercially.

Milliken's order also prohibits sportsmen from selling salmon to restaurants or groceries and gives state officials authority to seize any coho sold commercially.

Exactly how the chemical is entering the fish isn't yet known, nor is its source.

The chemical, of which sole American manufacturer is the Monsanto Co., is used most commonly to increase the durability of a wide variety of products—among them, varnish, wax, brake fluids, electrical insulation fluids, paints and pesticides. Chemists believe most PCB enters the air and water when products containing it are discarded or burned.

Exactly how the chemical is entering the fish isn't yet known, nor is its source. But FDA officials said the PCB is being found in widespread areas of the country.

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Thought you would be interested in this and the attached article. We are fast developing quite a name for ourselves in Michigan.

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