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Outdoors

With Don L. Johnson

Bad News, Good News...

Now what? News about chemical contamination of Lake Michigan fish could get worse before it gets better. Recent studies have shown that while DDT levels have dropped rapidly, some related compounds called polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) have been found in increasingly worrisome amounts.

PCB's, which have had wide and varied uses in industry for many years, are more persistent, and therefor probably more toxic, than DDT according to Paul Degurse, microbiologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The problem is not confined to Lake Michigan. In the latest report from Earthwatch-Wisconsin—a service of the Sea Grant program and Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin— Degurse is quoted as saying, "We have never found a fish in the state of Wisconsin that did not contain some PCB's."

Many of the known sources of PCB contamination have been shut off, but even if it's halted entirely nobody knows how long the problem will linger.

Degurse and other researchers first detected PCB's several years ago, while analyzing fish samples for DDT content. Now, Degurse says, still other persistent hydrocarbons—not yet analyzed—are present in Lake Michigan. They may be just as bad as PCB's, he says.

So, have a nice day.

RAINBOW TROUT ARE close to warm water outlets and stream mouths along the Lake Michigan shore these days. Many are heavy with spawn, and will be heading up the tributary streams as soon as there's a good spring thaw.

Because shoreline fishing spots are at a premium in some places, fishermen have been dragging small boats across the icy beaches. Safety first. Life vests are a must.

Although some success is reported on artificial lures—small spoons, mostly—the spawn sack remains the most reliable bait this time of year. Nightcrawlers have taken some big fish, however, and even dead smelt have been effective at times.

Brown trout have been a big attraction at the nuclear plant in Manitowoc County, too.

With such fine fishing at stake, there should be ample incentive to get that lake cleaned up, and keep it that way.

THE FARTHER NORTH you go, the deeper the frost you'll find, right? Wrong! In northern Wisconsin, where snow cover comes early and lasts all winter, frost depth is less than the state average.

Art Peterson, extension soil scientist for the University of Wisconsin — Madison, says that the frost reports point to an early spring.

Frost reaches its greatest depth by the third week in February, when the state average was 21 inches. A combination of low subsoil moisture and recent heavy snow cover will probably hasten the thaw this year, Peterson says.

As of Feb. 28, northern Wisconsin had two to three feet of snow, and a foot or less of frost.

Anyway, winter's on the ropes when The Milwaukee Sentinel Sports-Travel and Boat Show opens. That happens Friday night at the Milwaukee Convention Center and Auditorium. The show closes March 23. It's time to warm up for spring!

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