

Suspected Carcinogen Dumped In Fish Beds

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The government's top doctor has asked the Environmental Protection Agency to stop industries from dumping a suspected cancer-causing chemical into waterbeds where it contaminates food fish, it was turned yesterday.

"The recent findings in

both the Hudson River and Lake Champlain of high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in food fish are of deep concern to us," said Dr. Theodore Cooper, the assistant secretary for health in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, in a letter to EPA Administrator Russell Train.

"THE SOURCE of the PCBs in the Hudson River, at least, seems to be at least in part the discharge of this class of chemicals by industrial plants operating under a permit by EPA for such discharge."

Cooper cited recent but still unpublished studies confirming that PCBs have been shown to cause cancer in rats.

His office made a copy of the letter available to UPI.

PCBs are a group of chemical compounds with worldwide industrial uses. In the United States they are often used in the manufacture of electrical transformers and capacitors.

PLANTS ARE allowed to dump PCB waste into waterbeds in amounts limited by

federal license. But Cooper said "the rationale for the continuing license to discharge PCBs into water where they may enter the food chain should be immediately re-evaluated."

"While the current state of our knowledge as to the biological activity of these substances is not complete, we feel available evidence dictates that immediate action should be taken to terminate the discharge of PCBs," he wrote.

"Such action would be in the best interests of protection of public health and safety by eventually terminating PCB entry into the food chain and subsequent exposure of the American people," he said.

Although Cooper did not say which industrial plants he was referring to, General Electric plants at Fort Edward and Hudson Falls, N.Y., are among the factories that discharge PCBs into the water in the upstate New York areas he mentioned.

AN EPA SPOKESMAN said GE was one of "thousands" of manufacturers issued discharge permits for various pollutants under the 1972 authority.

He said GE has challenged the terms of a federal permit that would have set limits to the PCB dumping at its Fort Edward and Hudson Falls plants by 1977, and the plants currently may discharge such wastes "as usual" until the dispute is resolved.

Food and Drug Administration spokesman said several recent samplings of salmon, salmon heads and fish oil in the Midwest contained higher levels of PCBs than the FDA allows in fish and shellfish.

New York's commissioner of environmental conservation, Ogden Reid, has issued a public warning against eating striped bass from the Hudson and Coho salmon from Lake Ontario because of the threat of PCB poisoning.

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