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Total Impact Unknown

Commission Asks PCB Ban

The Natural Resources Commission has called for legislation banning use of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in Michigan.

Commissioners approved a policy statement last week in the wake of a report that PCB contamination of Great Lakes fish continues high in spite of controls of major sources of discharges.

"IT IS now apparent that PCBs are contained in a wide variety of products and utilized in many industrial processes, making environmental protection through traditional effluent standards virtually impossible," the commission noted.

"The total impact of PCBs on our natural resources is unknown. However, there is substantial evidence indicating that they interfere with the production of viable eggs from at least northern pike and salmon in Lake Michigan and its tributaries."

Many fish species, including large salmon, lake trout and catfish, do not meet the current Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standard for consumer products for 5.0 parts-per-million for PCBs, the commission said.

"EVIDENCE IS accumulating that PCBs are as ubiquitous in our land, water and atmospheric environment as DDT once was," the policy declared. "It has been found in the polar ice caps, in our Great Lakes area snowfall as well as in fish from all our Great Lakes waters."

The commission noted that, despite assurances from Monsanto Chemical Co., (sole U.S. manufacturer of PCBs) that they now limit sales to so-called "closed systems" involving electrical transformers and capacitors, there is no mechanism available to readily dispose of used PCBs either through incineration or land disposal.

The policy statement came in response to a report that PCBs are, according to reports by industries, used in 20 different products in Michigan.

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