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# Ohio river catfish polluted



Dave Bowring

A long-term cleanup of the Ohio river for sport and commercial fishing received a setback this week when the Cincinnati-based Ohio River Valley Sanitation commission announced the discovery of chlordane and polychlorinated biphenyls — substances which caused cancer in rats — in sample catfish taken from eight locations on the river between Pittsburgh and southern Illinois.

Commission Director Leo Weaver said the source of the chemicals is not known, but added it probably is diffuse.

"PCB's are used rather widely in electrical switches to prevent arcing, such as in power stations and substations, but we don't know if the source of the PCB's is from plants where it is assembled or from plants where it is used, or both," Weaver said.

Weaver said chlordane, which came under "70 to 80 per cent restriction" by the U.S. Environmental Protection agency earlier this year, is used in Scott's lawn care products. "It (Scott's compound) keeps ticks and chiggers off the dog and the kids, but it runs off with the first rain."

BILL KLEIN, assistant executive director of the ORVSC and a biologist, said both chemicals found in the sample catfish are "hard," meaning they are non- biodegradable and persist for long periods in the environment.

"I would say this type of chemical would persist from months to years rather than days. They didn't occur overnight and they won't disappear overnight" even if the sources are controlled, Klein said.

"Fish are great concentrators of chemicals," continued Klein. "They (chemicals) may be in very low ratios in the water, but fish pick them up and store them in the humanly edible portions of their bodies, somewhat like the mercury in Lake Erie."

Weaver said there were over 100 bass fishing tournaments held on the Ohio river in the past year. It is thought similar concentrations of the chemicals would be present in bass as well as catfish.

"WE HAVE NO WAY to ban either commercial or sport fishing on the river, but the individual states have the authority to refuse to issue commercial fishing licenses and to prohibit the interstate shipment of fish for human consumption," said Weaver.

Kentucky and West Virginia exercised this authority in 1974. Ohio has no such authority since it does not own the river. Klein said the Ohio Department of Natural Resources took part in the sampling program on an information-only basis.

"About all we could do concerning sport fishing on the river is warn the fishermen about our findings," Klein said. "We have no authority to ban sport fishing."

Weaver said a report detailing findings by the U.S. Environmental Protection agency is expected to be completed shortly to match that of the U.S. Food and Drug administration. F&DA discovered the chlordane and PCB's at their Cincinnati lab, Weaver said.

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