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PCBs in Striped Bass Held No Human Threat

By United Press International

The Environmental Protection Agency said Friday that low levels of toxic polychlorinated biphenyls found in Chesapeake Bay striped bass will not harm persons who eat the fish.

The EPA based its conclusion on a study by Westinghouse Ocean Research Laboratory, where samples of both flesh and eggs of the fish were analyzed.

An EPA spokesman said the results showed "PCB concentrations in striped bass from the Chesapeake Bay region will pose no health hazard to consumers of the fish."

PCBs are a family of chemicals once used extensively in making electrical equipment and other products where their heat resistance is an advantage. They are known to lower the reproductive levels of fish and are thought to endanger human and animal reproductivity when ingested in quantities.

The sampled striped bass were taken from the major Chesapeake Bay spawning areas, including the James and Potomac rivers.

The EPA reported that the PCB levels in the flesh of 36 of 37 sampled fish averaged 0.49 parts per million. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's tolerance level is 5 ppm.

One fish, however, had a concentration of 22 ppm., which the EPA said "suggested that fish from high PCB concentration areas such as the Hudson River in New York have migrated into the bay."

PCB in Eggs

Eggs from 20 fish samples averaged 3 ppm PCB content, a level that would lower reproduction levels in certain species, although the effect on striped bass is not known, the EPA said.

The agency said a study of striped bass spawning was planned for 1977 to determine the effects of the chemical on egg development.

Dave Bailey, acting enforcement chief for the Virginia Water Control Board, said a program is under way to determine the extent of PCB contamination in the Roanoke River basin, where it was widespread in the early 1970s.

He said PCB problems have cropped up in several areas of the state because of the presence of electronic and textile plants and other businesses using the chemicals.

Monsanto Action

The EPA said PCB levels declined after it persuaded Monsanto Chemical, the only U.S. maker of PCBs, to restrict distribution.

Bailey said levels were as high as 20 or 30 ppm in fish in the early 1970s, but sank back to 1 or 2 ppm by 1973.

The EPA, however, was not able to restrict imports of products made with PCBs, which the electrical industry found it difficult to replace, and contamination has again widespread.

The state of New York recently put the Hudson River, a major East Coast striped bass spawning grounds, off limits to fishing because of PCB pollution from two General Electric plants.

The state also declined to stock Lake Ontario with salmon because officials believed PCB contamination would prevent their reproduction. Severally nationally ranked scientists attending a symposium at Gloucester Point last month suggested that the FDA's action level for PCBs may be lowered in the near future, perhaps to a level as low as .5 ppm, or to the 1 ppm action level maintained by the Canadian government.

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