PCB Threat Real to Virginia

A news story out of New York this week indicated the famed Hudson River will be closed to commercial fishing because of contamination by toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB).

Similar action looms as a threat in Virginia. There are few waters in the country's watersheds, including Virginia, where contamination of PCB cannot be found in fish, according to Nathaniel P. Reed, assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks of the Department of the Interior.

Officials of Virginia conservation and wildlife agencies agree that Virginia's waters contain traces of the toxic chemical, but are hesitant to predict the presence became a definitive answer have been given.

Speaking at a federally-sponsored conference in Chicago last November, Reed declared, "The contamination of fish and wildlife in our environment is very real. Any meeting on environ whether upon all of our fish and wildlife resources programs which demand an environmental quality and healthy habitat."

PCB's have a wide variegated use. The most important of its selection is electrical transformers and capacitors, because of its chemical stability, fire retardancy and electrical insulation properties.

PCB residues have been found in all of the fish samples taken from 100 stations located in major river systems throughout the United States, according to Reed. It has been found "in almost all of the birds examined from coast to coast since 1970....Waterfowl carry the highest residues in the Atlantic Flyway, followed in descending order by the Mississippi, Pacific and Central Flyways."

ONE VIRGINIA OFFICIAL said there is some evidence that the effects, particularly within the area of reproduction

Outdoors



By Max Aller

capabilities within fowl and wildlife, attributed to the pesticide DDT may possibly be due to chemicals (as PCB) not readily recognized. Fish and wildlife interest with PCB have been found to have low reproductive rates.

While the problems created by PCB production wastes have been known since the 1930's, not much has been done since 1970 to resolve the problems of PCB pollution.

David Chance, a biologist with the Virginia Water Control Board has been studying white perch samples of the James River to go others up massive increases for the duration of these fish in the James River basin. He admits that PCB is present in the James River fish, as it is in fish of most Atlantic Coast rivers fish populations. He thinks, however, that the presence of high copper levels in water perch rivers, as indicated in preliminary studies, are the cause of white perch decimation.

The white perch is a close kin to striped bass, a popular Virginia food fish. Striped bass have been declining in Virginia waters over the past five years. Virginia Institute of Marine Science scientists, however, believe poor spawning conditions since 1970 have been the cause of the declining numbers of striped bass.

NEW YORK'S HUDSON River is being closed against the netting of striped bass because of PCB contamination. Chesapeake Bay striped bass are known to migrate northward during the summer months.

The PCB contamination on the Hudson River, according to the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, is coming largely from two Overfield Electric capacitor plants located about 25 miles above Albany.

A New York marine biologist said, "If these fish are not fit to eat when taken from the Hudson, then they are not fit to eat when taken off Long Island, the New Jersey coast, and New England. It clearly points up the need for federal intervention for controlling toxic substances and their effect on man."

Scientists, according to Reed, are not sure what amount of PCB fish flesh comprises a danger to man. The Food and Drug Administration permits a maximum level of 5.0 ppm for fish flesh consumption. Canada, however, limits the permissible level to only 2.0 ppm.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL Protection Agency has not yet "used its water pollution control authorities to regulate discharges of especially toxic substances," said Reed. The EPA, however, has an comprehensive authority to regulate toxic substances in the environment. However Congress has been debating such legislation for over five years without successful conclusion.

Virginia, of course, is concerned with the presence of the highly toxic substance, a non-degradable chemical, which has been dumped into the James River. Hopewell manufacturers of Kepone have been dumping chemical residue into the James River for eight years. And that snarling dam wrongly coincides with the demise of both the white perch and the striped bass and, in the past two years, a lower crop for bass and fish and fishermen.

PCB residue may be a contributing factor to a diminishing James River fishery. But that remains to be determined until such time as the chemical can be screened out of the other pollutants flowing in the James River.

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