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Professor warns of spread of PCB

By MARK BROWN
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WASHINGTON — A Northern Michigan University professor Thursday told Congress that every lake trout he analyzed from Lake Superior four years ago contained measurable quantities of a highly toxic chemical.

Prof. Ronald A. Parejko warned that the level of these chemicals, called Polychlorinated Biphenyls or PCB's, has steadily increased, threatening the entire ecosystem of Lake Superior and the other Great Lakes.

Parejko testified before a House merchant marine and fisheries subcommittee, which is holding hearings on the PCB problem.

PCB's are an extraordinary chemical which can withstand high temperatures, causing their widespread use in many industries throughout the country during the last 45 years.

However, it has only recently been determined that PCB's pose a significant health hazard to fish and wildlife, and that they may cause cancer in humans.

Moreover, PCB's have been accumulating so rapidly that they have now been found in fish samples from every major river system in the country, and in most bird samples taken by the Interior Department since 1970.

Parejko said he became interested in the PCB problem in 1971, and he launched his analysis of Lake Superior using an Interior Department grant.

Of the 20 lake trout he netted in the Michigan waters of Lake Superior, he said every fish analyzed contained concentrations of PCB, ranging from three to 14 parts per million.

Current Food and Drug Administration regulations set five parts per million as the permissible level in fish.

By comparison, Parejko said 15 lake trout that were raised in a Michigan hatchery and fed an artificial diet of fish feed pellets had 95 percent less PCB's.

He indicated that he is currently monitoring Lake Superior fish for updated PCB contents, but his research is not yet complete.

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