FDA Rapped at Hearing Over Chemical in Fish

By JAMES WELSH
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Edible fish containing 72 times the Food and Drug Administration tolerance levels for PCBs were found in an Alabama creek last year, and nothing has been done about it, a Senate subcommittee was told today.

Sen. William D. Spong, D-Va., a member of a Commerce subcommittee on the environment, introduced a letter from an Alabama fisheries official reporting PCB levels as high as 360 parts per million in fish caught in the Choccoloca Creek, near Anniston.

The FDA tolerance limit is 5 parts per million for the PCBs, polychlorinated biphenyl's, which are industrial chemicals that act like DDT and are suspected of causing long-term ill effects on health.

Sam L. Spencer, assistant chief of fisheries for Alabama, said in the letter that the samples were collected for the southern regional office of FDA.

"Yet FDA apparently did not intend to advise us of this contamination problem," he said.

In a telephone interview today, Spencer said the creek has not been closed for fishing. That's a job for the state health department, which hasn't moved on the problem, he said.

"As far as I know, the fish in that creek still have a high level of PCBs in their bodies," said Spencer.

He said the apparent source of the contamination is a Monsanto Corp. plant near Anniston that dumps wastes into the creek, which is a tributary of the Coosa River.

The fish collected at various points along the creek included bass, carp, catfish and spotted suckers. Three bass caught at one point were found to contain 360 parts per million of the PCBs.

At another point, the Alabama lab reports show, catfish were found containing 277 parts per million of the chemical.

The reports identified the contaminant as Arochlor 254, one of the PCBs in industrial use.

Monsanto is the sole American manufacturer of PCBs.

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