Lake salmon and trout 'unfit to eat'

By Casey Bukro
Environment editor

ALL LAKE MICHIGAN coho salmon and lake trout tested for PCB content last year were found to be unfit for human consumption, a United States Fish and Wildlife Service expert testified Thursday.

PCB — polychlorinated biphenyl — is an industrial poison found widely scattered throughout the world at levels considered hazardous to public health.

The fish and wildlife expert, Wayne Willford, testified at a three-day conference in the Pick-Congress hotel aimed at focusing attention on the newly emerging environmental hazard.

In sampling done last fall, Willford said, 70 to 80 per cent of Lake Michigan chubs and 100 per cent of the lake's coho salmon and lake trout had PCB levels higher than the 5 parts per million parts foods limit set by the Food and Drug Administration.

Lake Michigan fish are tainted with the highest doses of PCB found in the five Great Lakes, says Francis Mayo, Great Lakes regional director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The next highest amounts are found in fish in Lakes Ontario and Huron. The lowest PCB levels are found in Lakes Superior and Erie, Mayo said.

"COMMERCIAL USE of Lake Michigan salmon and lake trout cannot even be considered at this time because of the contamination level," Willford said. The fish cannot be sold in interstate commerce, and fishermen who put them on sale risk arrest.

Many salmon and lake trout were tested by Willford.

Federal experts at the conference have testified that PCB poisoning can cause fatigue, numbness, skin disorders, and reproductive failure.

"I recommend that people who eat these fish go by the recommendation of several states, and that is not to eat more than one meal of these fish a week," said Willford.

"Pregnant women and children should avoid it."

The National Fisheries Institute Inc., of Washington, D.C., representing 350 seafood packers and distributors, asked for a nationwide ban on PCB because of "the potential risk to the American food supply."

PCB products are used widely in the electrical equipment industry because of their heat resistant qualities. They also are used for making plastics.

WILFORD SAID sampling shows that PCB levels in Lake Michigan fish have stayed about the same since 1972, despite voluntary efforts to curb PCB pollution.

John Hesse, of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, testified here that his department is urging a national ban on domestic and imported PCBs, except for those used in the electrical industry. Michigan's legislature introduced a bill on Aug. 14 to prohibit the manufacture, sale, and use of PCBs except for transformers and capacitors.

PCB poison ruins family's fish business

By Casey Bukro
Environment editor

PCB SPELLS THE END of a way of life for the Hermes family of Green Bay, Wis.

A Green Bay commercial fishing family going back 70 to 80 years, the Hermes were shut down by the United States Food and Drug Administration last August because of excessive PCB in the fish they caught.

"We never knew about PCBs until a few months ago," said Jean Hermes, 32.

"It seemed to happen overnight. PCB poisoned the fish so they were inedible. They're dangerous to eat. The FDA shut us down. It means the end of our livelihood."

Mrs. Hermes came to Chicago with her husband, Jim, 33, to tell their story before a national PCB conference in the Pick-Congress hotel, which opened Wednesday.

A lot has been heard about PCB, most of it technical. The Hermes gave a human side of the story.

PCB — SHORT FOR polychlorinated biphenyls — is an industrial poison considered a growing environmental and public health threat. It works like a cross between DDT and mercury, two long-lasting poisons.

"It wrecked our business," said Jim Hermes. "All I know is commercial fishing." He estimates he has $100,000 tied up in fishing equipment, which he used mainly to catch carp.

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