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Commercial Fishermen Idled By Federal Action

PEPIN, Minn. (AP) — About 40 commercial fishermen are temporarily out of business and upset over the federal government's decision to ban interstate shipment of contaminated carp.

"They should stop the fellows that are dumping the stuff," says Steve Breitung, the only full-time fisherman in this tiny Mississippi River community. "They act like we're polluters."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has outlawed the shipment of carp with certain levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Breitung, 33, questions the health hazard of the carp with the PCB. He says an FDA official has said a person would have to eat the fish daily for three years before dangerous levels of the chemical could be measured.

"I don't see how they can consider it a health hazard. Who eats fish every day for three years? I don't think it's

really too much of a hazard if that's the case."

But his livelihood is tied to catching, with long seine nets, the fish that sport fishermen disdain.

Breitung normally hauls in 7,000 to 8,000 pounds of fish, mostly carp, three or four times a week. He sells them to wholesaler Buzz Hogue for five cents a pound, which means a gross of \$1,050 to \$1,600 weekly.

Breitung said his catches net him an income comparable to a local teacher.

Hogue also feels the frustration because he depends on carp for 70 per cent of his business. "I'll just have to get carp elsewhere," he says. "I'm going to haul in fish from legal areas and keep in business."

He normally buys 40,000 to 50,000 pounds of fish each week from Lake Pepin fishermen, which means from \$600,000 to \$350,000 will be going to commercial fishermen elsewhere. He figures there are about a dozen full-time fishermen on the lake.

Hogue ships the fish to East Coast markets.

The idle Breitung is taking a wait-and-see attitude. "I'll kind of ride it out for a while. Maybe I'll go on welfare," he quipped. "I'm not really trained for anything besides a fisherman."

His father, Earl, went into semiretirement two years ago after fishing for a living for more than 50 years.

Breitung thinks the government should check the game fish also. "I'm sure some of these game fish have in it them."

He feels the ban is applied unfairly to carp.

"Either they're safe or they're not," he adds.