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UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IV

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fish taken from Lake Hartwell and Twelve Mile Creek in Pickens County, South Carolina should not be eaten until further notice, according to a statement issued jointly today by E. Kenneth Aycock, M. D., Commissioner of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), and Jack E. Ravan, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, Region IV. Joining in the statement were the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In test results, DHEC discovered levels of polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCB's) in fish taken from the area which may be hazardous to human health. The preliminary tests appear to indicate that the high PCB levels are confined to Twelve Mile Creek area, but as a safety precaution, Dr. Aycock and Mr. Ravan extended the advisory to include fish taken from the whole of Lake Hartwell.

According to Mr. Ravan, PCB's are a group of organic compounds used primarily in the manufacture of electronic compacitors and transformers. PCB's are toxic to aquatic life, persistent in

the environment for long periods of time, and are biologically accumulative.

"There is wide spread evidence that PCB's are presently in the environments throughout the country but their significance as a health hazard is not thoroughly known," said Aycock.

The preliminary DHEC laboratory findings are the result of an ongoing study of PCB's in South Carolina. Findings were confirmed Friday by EPA.

When sources of the contaminants are found, these sources will be eliminated," the agencies said. Potential sources have already been identified in the watershed outside the reservoir in Pickens County, South Carolina and will be investigated jointly by the two agencies next week.

The U. S. Food and Drug Administration has recommended a safety level of five parts per million for fish and shell fish. Studies conducted most recently show PCB levels ranging from 3-15 ppm in fish samples from the area.

Citizens in surrounding areas need not be alarmed about drinking water safety. While there are no official limits for PCB's for drinking water, the Environmental Protection Agency is considering a PCB standard of one part per billion in drinking water supplies.

"Drinking water supplies tested in Pickens County showed that PCB levels do not exceed that level," Aycock said.

Aycock and Mr. Ravan both confirmed that Lake Hartwell waters are safe for all other uses. "Swimming and other water recreation need not be restricted," the statement said.

The DHEC technical staff is working closely with EPA on pinpointing and eliminating the sources of PCB's in the Pickens County area. Monitoring wells are also being installed to check on any possible ground water contamination. DHEC and EPA will monitor the other areas of South Carolina where potential PCB concentrations may exist.

PCB's were found to exist in very small concentrations one year ago during a routine pesticide analysis of drinking water supplies in Pickens County. The DHEC Bureau of Epidemiology then conducted a study of death rates in the area to determine if there was an unusally high rate of cancer of the liver, cancer of the gall bladder and other related diseases suspected to be caused by very high concentrations by PCB's. There were no statistically significant instances of deaths from these diseases.

"The trace amounts of PCB's found in drinking water supplies in Pickens County are not of significanct magnitude to cause alarm," says Aycock. "We are continuing to research the data and will take appropriate action if a potential health hazard exists. The DHEC and EPA technical staff will continue to monitor water supplies in the area."

Mr. Ravan stated that the EPA is working with DHEC, Army Corps of Engineers, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, the Fish and Wildlife Agencies of South Carolina and Georgia, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the full extent of PCB presence in water and fish in the Hartwell Reservoir area.