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LARGEST CIRCULATION IN THE WEST
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U.S. Sharply Lowers Allowed PCB Levels

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Food and Drug Administration Thursday sharply lowered the levels of the toxic chemical PCB allowed in fish, poultry and dairy products sold in interstate commerce.

The new tolerance level for fish and shellfish, which is the main pathway for PCB contamination to humans, will be 2 parts per million, down from the current 5 p.p.m.

The new tolerance levels go into effect Aug. 28.

The FDA estimated the changed tolerance level will cost commercial fishermen on the Great Lakes, the Hudson River and other fresh waterways an estimated $6 million worth of fish a year.

FDA Commissioner Donald Kennedy sent letters to the governors of 11 states with PCB-contaminated waters, urging them to take action to lower state tolerance levels for fish caught and consumed by sport fishermen or sold intrastate by commercial fishermen.

The FDA said the amount of PCB's—polychlorinated biphenyls—in Americans' diet "has dropped significantly" since 1973, when the regulatory agency first set tolerance levels.

But the problem is even worse than scientists believed in the early 1970's, because recent studies have linked PCB's to liver tumors and reproductive problems in test animals, the FDA said.

The Environmental Protection Agency in April banned manufacture of PCB's and ordered a phaseout over five years of most of the remaining industrial uses of the toxic chemical.

PCB's have been widely used as an electrical insulator in transformers and as an ingredient in paints, lubricants, carbonless copy paper and other products. They resist heat, oxidation, acids and other chemicals, and can be absorbed quickly into plastic and glass.

But PCB's also are nonbiodegradable, and as a result, PCB's that build up in the soil, water or in a person's body tissue stay there.

Saltwater fish, which are the bulk of fish that Americans eat, are rarely contaminated with PCB's, according to the FDA.

The FDA's new tolerance level for milk and dairy products will be cut from 2.5 p.p.m. to 1.5 p.p.m. (on a fat basis); in poultry from 5 p.p.m. to 3 p.p.m. (fat basis), and in eggs from 0.5 p.p.m. to 0.3 p.p.m.

Kennedy sent letters to the governors of Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

"I urge you to reexamine the PCB problem within your state and to consider whether additional measures are necessary," he wrote.

In 1971, the Monsanto Corp., the sole U.S. producer, restricted sales of PCB's for use only in closed-system electrical machines such as transformers.

But it has been estimated that prior to 1971, 40% of the PCB's used in the United States eventually leaked into the environment. An EPA study several years ago estimated that more than 90% of Americans have some PCB in their body tissues.

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