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Michigan Can Head Nation in Control of PCB—Tanner

LANSING - Michigan cannot solve the nation's PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) contamination problems alone, but the state can take the leadership role in an effort to ban sale and manufacture of the toxic insulating material, says the Department of Natural Resources.

DNR Director Howard A. Tanner says that proposed legislation recently reported out of the House Marine Affairs Committee, chaired by State Representative David Bonior of Mount Clemens, would

"clearly give the Department authority to effectively work on the problem."

"Levels of PCB's have not declined in Great Lakes fish despite extensive DNR efforts to eliminate point-source discharges," states Tanner. "This concerned the Natural Resources Commission (which sets policy for the DNR) to recommend last June that the chemical be banned, and to seek the legislative and administrative action necessary to expedite this goal in Michigan."

"The Department is pleased with the proposed legislation and confident that it would provide adequate mechanisms for control and limitation of the PCB problem," continues Tanner. "Further, the Department is optimistic that levels of PCB contamination will decline once remaining environmental losses are eliminated."

Tanner adds that Governor William G. Milliken's recent support of the PCB control bill (House Bill 5619) and the Governor's challenge that Michigan assume the state-level leadership role in the U.S. are encouraging signs.

In a statement issued last week, Governor Milliken states that PCB levels in many large Great Lakes fish were above the five ppm (parts per million) set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as acceptable for consumer foods and that PCB's have even been found "at alarming levels in Great Lakes area snowfall and rainfall."

"In the past several years, Michigan has led the nation in dealing forthrightly and effectively with pollutants that pose a serious threat to our environment—including DDT and mercury," the Governor stated. "I believe that our state should once again demonstrate its leadership by dealing...with the growing PCB problem."

Tanner notes that a recent study of PCB's in Lake Superior fish by Northern Michigan University researchers showing that levels of the pollutant were above the five ppm level in certain varieties of lake trout found in the off-shore areas near Isle Royale and the Caribou Islands confirmed earlier DNR studies that reached the same conclusion. However, PCB levels in the lean varieties of lake trout, ordinarily taken in the near-shore areas of Lake Superior in the sport fishery, do not exceed the minimum guidelines.

"There is nothing new or alarming about the NMU report, as PCB levels have not declined in the Great Lakes since being discovered in 1970," states Tanner. "What is significant, however, is the fact that public attention is now being directed at the real problem, that PCB's are more than a contaminant in fish, that they are finding their way through a multitude of small sources into biological systems."

"Evidence indicates that PCB's may interfere with the reproduction of Great Lakes fish and are

dictated upon the entire cycle of life. It is a tremendous environmental problem that we must bring under control."

responsible for reproductive failure in Michigan's fish-eating birds, including the bald eagle," the director continues. "The concern is what effect has PCB's in-