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CLIPPED BY BACONS

Action expected on toxins in fish

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WASHINGTON — Federal officials, alarmed by dangerously high levels of a group of toxin chemicals found in fish, today may act to restrict the chemicals' use. But they will not ban them as other countries have done.

The chemicals are called polychlorinated biphenyls — PBC's. They have been widely used since 1930 in manufacturing processes such as the making of electrical transformers. PCB's now appear to be widespread in the nation's lakes and rivers where they manufacturers dump them.

Earlier this month, consumers were warned not to eat striped bass from the Hudson River in New York or salmon from Lake Ontario because of unsafe levels of PCB's. Also, fish brought from Wisconsin to stock lakes in St. Louis, Mo., were found to be contaminated with 10 times the safe level of PCB's. All fish in five lakes in the city had to be destroyed.

In May, the Food And Drug Administration (FDA) seized 124,612 15.5 ounce cans of coke salmon from Lake Michigan and 6400 frozen Lake Michigan salmon because of PCB contamination.

And studies of fish-eating birds in many industrial states have found the birds to have high concentrations of PCB's in their bodies.

Although PCB's have caused liver damage in test animals, the potential long-range threat to humans is not known. PCB's build up in the human body. The only clinical experience came in 1968 when 1000 Japanese ate rice oil contaminated by PCB's and developed darkened skins, eye discharge and severe acne. Sixteen deaths from that incident have been attributed to PCB's, but this has not been proven.

Russell E. Train, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has called a meeting today of his top aides to set public policy on the PCB's issue.

Reportedly, they are thinking of reviewing all permits they have issued to let companies dump PCB's into lakes and rivers.

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