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NEWSDAY, WEDNESDAY, JAN. 12, 1977

FILE

PCBs Are Found in Fish Near LI

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The toxic pollutant PCB has been found in concentrations exceeding those considered safe by the federal government in large striped bass and bluefish in western Long Island Sound, in eels and white perch in the Harlem and East Rivers, and in the waters of the Hudson below Manhattan.

The results, from testing during the past 18 months by the State Environmental Conservation Department, have led officials to consider a ban on commercial fishing in the three New York City rivers, and to caution those who eat bass and bluefish weighing three pounds or more from western Long Island waters. Such a ban would extend the one ordered in February for most fishing in the Hudson from Fort Edward south to the Battery Tunnel—about 185 miles.

Anthony Tsormina, director of the Division of Marine and Coastal Resources for the state environmental unit, said yesterday that the contaminated fish found in Long Island Sound appear to have come from the Hudson, into which the General Electric Co. has dumped thousands of pounds of PCBs during the past 35 years. He added that shellfish, flounder, lobsters and all other marine life sampled in western Long Island bays had PCB concentrations far below federal safety limits.

"We are obligated to ask for a ban in the Harlem and East Rivers," he said, "and we will discuss the Upper Bay [Hudson below Manhattan] closing, too," with state health and environmental officials in Albany this week. He said he also is contemplating a caution against eating large bass or bluefish from western Long Island waters more than once a week. He did not explain why he was considering only a caution against eating fish from the western Sound, and not a ban on fishing there.

The highest concentrations among more than 1,000 fish tested were found in white perch caught in the lower East River near the Fulton Fish Market, according to state environmental records. One fish caught recently showed a concentration of 71 parts per million of the toxic material—more than 14 times the federal safety limit of five parts per million—the records showed. Eels in New York City rivers had up to twice the federal limit, they showed. Of all fish tested, less than 10 per cent showed high PCB concentrations.

Off Long Island, some striped bass and bluefish weighing more than three pounds had PCB concentrations of five to 13 parts per million. Most of the fish were from Manhasset Bay, Hempstead Harbor, Little Neck Bay and Fire Island Inlet. A striped bass taken off Montauk in September, 1975, had a PCB concentration of 8.89 parts per million, but Tsormina said it appeared to be a stray. No fishing ban or formal caution is being considered for Fire Island Inlet.

"Our figures are not from a random sample," Tsormina said. "We selected the areas we thought would be polluted." He added that he believed that if a random sample had been taken, less than 1 per cent of all the fish in the tested areas would have significant PCB concentrations. He did not give his reasons for coming to such a conclusion.

PCBs—polychlorifated biphenyls—are used as insulating fluid in electric transformers, in carbonless copy paper and in special adhesives. They have been shown to cause liver cancer in research animals, and, in an instance of human contamination in Japan 10 years ago, were linked to increases in the number of stillborn babies, bone and joint deformities and neurological disorders. In that case, the concentrations were about 2,000 to 3,000 parts of PCB per million.

An estimated 458,000—pounds of PCBs have been dumped into the Hudson. Most have been traced to General Electric plants in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls, near Albany. High PCB concentrations in sediments have been discovered as far south as Westchester County. The State Environmental Conservation Department is considering a dredging or other clean-up program in the Hudson.

Tsormina said the bass and bluefish off Long Island may have higher PCB concentrations than other fish because of their migratory patterns into the Hudson. The Hudson is linked to the Sound by the Harlem and East Rivers, and to Fire Island Inlet by Upper Bay. He said there currently is no large fishing area in the three New York City rivers, although eels are taken in those waters.

Save our Stripers, a Long Island fishing group, has charged that PCB contamination is responsible for a sharp decrease in striped bass populations off Long Island in the past year. But Tsormina said the variations are not beyond the normal cyclical changes.