EAU CLAIRE, WIS.
LEADER TELEGRAM
D. 22,500

MAY 2 3 1975

FDA says ban is precaution

Why has the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ordered a Lake Pepin fish wholesaler to bury more than 60,000 pounds of carp that New Yorkers consider a delicacy?

Because they contain higher than acceptible limits of PCBs, was the reply from Don Lund, an FDA spokesman close to the Lake Pepin scene.

What harm can PCBs cause human beings? he was asked.

"None for certain," the FDA specialist explained, saying that the chemical compound is believed to cause cancer in laboratory animals exposed to high concentrations of PCBs.

Lund and his supervisor, Henry Roberts of the FDA St. Paul, Minn. office, admitted that a person would have to eat Pepin carp every day of the week for three straight years before it could even be measured.

Precaution

However, Roberts said it is better to keep a suspected product off the market until it is proven satisfactory than to permit it to be sold until proven harmful.

Has the FDA tested PCB levels in Lake Pepin walleyes and other favorite sport fish in those waters?

Yes, says Lund, who added: "in fact, we have data which shows the PCB level in Lake Pepin walleyes to be much higher than in the carp."

Then, if the FDA is concerned about the health of New York City residents who may eat Lake Pepin carp once a week or on special religious festivals, shouldn't it be as concerned about the health of a Lake Pepin area resident who may dine on fresh walleye filets twice or more a week?

That question put to St. Paul office FDA specialists by this writer drew this response:

"First of all, we (FDA) have jurisdiction only over commercial fish. Secondly, we could not issue an advisory to Lake Pepin area residents. That must come from either the Minnesota or Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources which do have jurisdiction."

Will the FDA recommend to either of these state agencies that they should warn area residents of the possible danger in eating PCB-saturated walleyes?

"No, probably because there wouldn't be that many people involved or affected," the FDA told this writer.

Apparently research into the PCB problem is not extensive. If PCBs in high concentrations (higher than that found in Lake Pepin carp) were found to cause cellular mutations (cancer) in laboratory animals, or are suspected of causing cancer in humans, then one might expect PCBs to cause cancer in fish. But there is no scientific evidence this occurs.

Level gone down

Moreover, FDA officials told this writer that the PCB levels in Lake Pepin are "much lower now than they were two years ago."

Then why wasn't the ban imposed in 1973?

"Because the concentrations (of PCBs) in carp were below the federal limits of 5 ppm," Lund said.

Lund explained PCB levels first were set by FDA in 1970, but a series of court tests only recently affirmed the power of the FDA to set PCB limits and to control interstate shipment of foods suspected of having a higher than permissible levels of the chemical.

Apparently Lake Pepin serves as a settling basin in the Mississippi River. Lund noted that while sport fish as well as rough fish have a high level of PCBs, "there is practically no PCB found in rough fish below the Alma dam (15 miles downstream from Lake Pepin.) It hasn't even approached the 5 ppm limit there," he declared.

Lund believes that the problem which finally came to a head may have positive fallout in that it could result in greater coordination among all agencies who have a stake in the Mississippi river fishery management. Heretofore, federal and state units have gone on their own with less than adequate coordination with research.

MONS 030968