

Baseline Concentrations of Polychlorinated Biphenyls and DDT in Lake Michigan Fish, 1971¹

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ABSTRACT

Responding to the recommendations of the Lake Michigan Interstate Pesticide Committee, the author aimed to establish baseline data on polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) and DDT in Lake Michigan fish in 1971. Because the past 2 years had witnessed unprecedented legislative action to protect food resources and other aquatic species near the top of the food chain from persistent hazardous chemicals, the author also attempted to gauge the impact of cooperative legislative action on the quality of large lakes.

Thirteen species of fish taken from 14 regions of Lake Michigan in the fall of 1971 were analyzed for PCB's and DDT analogs. Mean wet-weight concentrations of PCB's similar to Aroclor 1254 ranged from 2.7 ppm in rainbow smelt to 15 ppm in lake trout. Most trout and salmon longer than 12 inches contained PCB's at concentrations greater than the tolerance level of 5 ppm established by the Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Mean concentrations of total DDT ranged from less than 1 ppm in suckers to approximately 16 ppm in large lake trout. The presence of the major chlorinated hydrocarbons was confirmed by gas-liquid chromatography/mass spectrometry; additional PCB confirmations were obtained through perchlorination. The most abundant PCB's were tetra-, penta-, hexa-, and heptachlorobiphenyls which are similar to commercially prepared Aroclor 1254; lesser chlorinated PCB's were present in fish from nearshore waters.

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Introduction

This paper identifies and quantifies the most abundant organochlorine compounds, particularly polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) and DDT, in Lake Michigan fish in 1971. By establishing data on PCB's and DDT in Lake Michigan fish as recommended by the Lake Michigan Interstate Pesticide Committee, the author of the present study aimed to develop a 1971 baseline to predict trends of these chemicals in the lake. Lake Michigan contains much higher concentrations of potentially hazardous and persistent organic chemicals than the other Great Lakes, in part because of their widespread usage in the watershed and their disproportionately brief flushing period and low biomass density. Previous studies have shown that fish from Lake Michigan approach the action levels for dieldrin set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1); a major percentage of Lake Michigan fish exceeded the 5 ppm action level for DDT in 1969 (2). Similarly, Veith (3) has shown that PCB concentrations similar to Aroclor 1254 were greater than 15 ppm or three times the FDA action level in large fish captured from Lake Michigan in 1969.

Despite the comparatively high levels of DDT, dieldrin, and PCB's in Lake Michigan, there is no unequivocal evidence that they are endangering aquatic life. Concentrations of these chemicals appear to be below 10 parts per trillion (ppt) in the pelagic water and less than 100 ppt in nearshore waters. However, considerable indirect evidence suggests that the buildup of organochlorine compounds may threaten biological resources of the lake. Other reports have reviewed the chronic toxicity of pesticides and PCB's (4-7).

TABLE 3 (cont'd.). Mean concentrations of PCB's and DDT in fish, Lake Michigan—1971

LOCATION	CAPTURE DATE	No. FISH ANALYZED	PCB's	PERCENT-AGE FISH ABOVE 5 PPM PCB's	PCB's, LIPID WEIGHT	p,p'-DDE	p,p'-TDE	p,p'-DDT	o,p'-DDT	TOTAL DDT	PERCENT-AGE FISH ABOVE 5 PPM DDT
LAKE WHITEFISH (<i>Coregonus clupeaformis</i>)											
Michigan City	10/15	4	6.1[0.9]	100	25	0.5	0.32	0.5	0.06	1.4	0
Saugatuck	6/19	7	2.7[0.5]	0	15	0.6	0.21	0.4	0.08	1.3	0
Saugatuck	6/21	2	3.1[1.3]	0	18	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Grand Haven	9/6	7	5.8[0.9]	71	25	0.7	0.38	0.8	0.10	1.9	0
Grand Traverse Bay	10/19	13	1.8[0.3]	0	13	1.2	0.25	0.4	0.08	2.0	0
Rock Island	9/11	10	1.5[0.2]	0	9	0.7	0.16	0.4	0.05	1.4	0

NOTE: Expressions in brackets represent standard deviations.

ND = not determined.

Residues are ppm wet weight.

wives was greater in southern Lake Michigan than in the northern regions, although anomalies are apparent. Most alewives captured south of a line between Saugatuck and Sheboygan contained between 4.4 and 5.5 ppm PCB's, whereas those caught north of the line contained between 3.5 and 4.4 ppm. An interesting exception occurred in alewives from Rock Island just off the Door County Peninsula in Wisconsin; mean PCB concentration was 8.9 ppm.

Analysis of brown trout suggested similar trends: those from Michigan City at the southern end of the lake contained 11.9 ppm PCB's, whereas those from Sheboygan and Gills Rock contained 7.9 and 6.7 ppm PCB's, respectively.

Carp from Michigan City also had higher levels of PCB's than had those from the northern region. In contrast to the 11.0 ppm found in the Michigan City carp, those from Saugatuck and Sheboygan contained 4.6 and 1.7 ppm, respectively.

PCB's in bloaters in southern Lake Michigan ranged from 4.6 ppm near Milwaukee to 8.1 ppm near Saugatuck. In general, bloaters from the northern regions had concentrations below 5 ppm. The concentration of PCB's in the five groups of bloaters collected near Sheboygan during a 3-month period varied from 3.7 to 6.1 ppm, although the mean was below 5 ppm; no trend was indicated. The variation is somewhat less when data are expressed on a lipid basis; for example, PCB concentrations in the August 27 and October 15 bloaters were 5.0 and 3.7 ppm wet weight, respectively. In contrast, the concentration of PCB's in lipids was 23 ppm and 21 ppm, respectively. Thus much of the observed variation is caused by the variation in lipid content of fish.

All chinook salmon captured in Wisconsin contained more than 5 ppm PCB's; mean concentrations ranged from 9.9 ppm in Strawberry Creek (Sturgeon Bay) to 24 ppm at Milwaukee.

In concentrations of PCB's among coho salmon, authors observed little evidence of a trend dependent upon sampling region. Except for coho caught early in 1971 near Michigan City, mean concentrations of PCB's

ranged from 11.2 ppm in salmon near Ludington to 17.3 ppm in those near Michigan City.

Among lake trout PCB concentrations were greatest in those from Michigan City, Saugatuck, and Milwaukee, where mean concentrations were generally between 15 and 21 ppm. Trout from the northern areas such as Sheboygan, Ludington, Grand Traverse Bay, and Gills Rock contained considerably less, and mean concentrations ranged between 8 and 15 ppm.

Mean concentration of PCB's was unexpectedly high, 10.9 ppm, in the 10 yellow perch caught near Milwaukee. Perch from other regions averaged less by a factor of two, and those from lower Green Bay contained 2.7 ppm.

In seven Rock Island redhorse, PCB residues averaged 2.8 ppm. In nine specimens from St. Martin Island, mean concentration was 3.2 ppm.

Rainbow trout were caught only near Michigan City and Gills Rock. The Michigan City rainbow trout had 12.0 ppm PCB's, whereas those from Gills Rock averaged only 8.8 ppm.

Concentrations of PCB's in white suckers and smelt were generally between 2 and 4 ppm, although the average concentration was 6.0 ppm in the three white suckers from Saugatuck on October 15 and 10.6 ppm in the six from Michigan City the same day. Except for whitefish caught at Grand Haven and Michigan City, the PCB concentration in whitefish was less than 3.1 ppm.

DDT AND ANALOGS

Concentrations of p,p'-DDT, o,p'-DDT, p,p'-TDE, and p,p'-DDE are presented in Table 3 along with the total DDT and percentage of fish that contained residues above the 5ppm action level established by FDA (1). Total DDT in alewives ranged from 1.6 ppm near Waukegan to 5.0 ppm near the Manitou Islands. There was no trend in the variations according to region. A brown trout from Michigan City contained 8.4 ppm total DDT, whereas those from Sheboygan and Gills Rock averaged 4.4 ppm. Except for the carp from Michigan City, which averaged 4.6 ppm total DDT, average concentrations in Lake Michigan carp were 1.0 ppm or less.

Total DDT in bloaters ranged from 3.8 ppm at Frankfort and St. Martin Island to 6.2 ppm at Sheboygan. There are no trends for DDT in chubs (Table 3). Except for eight coho salmon caught near Michigan City in the spring, which averaged 1.6 ppm total DDT, total DDT in this species varied little throughout the lake. Mean concentrations ranged between 6.5 and 8.8 ppm.

Lake trout from Michigan City averaged 14.9 ppm total DDT on September 8, 1971; those caught October 15, 1971, averaged only 7.3 ppm. The discrepancy is likely due to size differences. For example, the lake trout caught near Milwaukee in September also contained a mean concentration of approximately 15 ppm; however, the smaller trout caught near Milwaukee in October averaged only 4.2 ppm total DDT. DDT concentrations in lake trout from northern areas of the lake were less than 8 ppm; approximately 60-70 percent of the lake trout contained over 5 ppm total DDT.

Yellow perch from Pensaukee Bar in lower Green Bay had the lowest DDT content, 0.5 ppm; perch from other areas contained between 1.3 and 4.5 ppm total DDT. None of the perch contained more than 5 ppm total DDT.

Concentration of DDT in smelt, whitefish, and white suckers averaged approximately 1-2 ppm, although white suckers from Michigan City averaged 4.6 ppm total DDT.

Summary

Concentration of PCB's ranged from less than 2 ppm in small fish with low lipid content to over 20 ppm in larger fish with higher lipid content. The concentration of PCB's in Lake Michigan coho salmon is two to three times greater than in coho from Lake Huron, approximately 1.5 times greater than in Lake Ontario coho salmon, and approximately 10 times greater than in coho from Lakes Erie and Superior. Essentially 100 percent of large salmon and trout, both popular food sources, and 50-80 percent of bloaters from Lake Michigan contain PCB concentrations greater than the 5 ppm tolerance level set by FDA. Additional monitoring of this watershed is needed to determine whether tissue concentrations will reflect restrictions in domestic PCB sales and possible decreases in PCB usage in the watershed even though U.S. production of Aroclor 1254 has remained essentially the same as in 1969 (24).

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