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Record 24 of 60

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Brier Creek fish have PCBs

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State health officials issued a warning Monday not to eat fish caught in the lower reaches of Little Brier Creek or Brier Creek reservoir in Wake County because fish taken there have shown high levels of cancer-causing PCBs.

Environmental investigators tested fish as part of an ongoing Environmental Protection Agency superfund investigation of Ward Transformer industrial site near Raleigh-Durham International Airport. Some fish contained PCBs at levels that would increase risk of cancer if eaten weekly over a period of years.

"We found elevated levels of PCBs in all fish sampled," said Luanne Williams, toxicologist with the state Division of Public Health.

Ward Transformer Sales & Service reconditions electrical transformers, and the processes it used from 1964 to 1979 allowed toxic chemicals including polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, from transformers to pollute the land and wash off into adjacent streams. Because of the widespread contamination, the site is on EPA's national priority list for cleanup. PCBs were added to oil in transformers and other electrical equipment to retard fires until their manufacture was stopped in the United States in 1977 and banned in 1979. They build up in the bodies of animals and can cause health hazards such as skin irritation, liver damage and cancer. The fish with PCBs were found in stretches of the creek downstream of Brier Creek Parkway. Investigators did not find any PCBs in sediment in Little Brier Creek upstream of the parkway.

Little Brier Creek and Brier Creek reservoir are remote and few people fish in them, so the potential exposure is limited. But the waters of

Little Brier Creek and the reservoir flow into Brier Creek. That eventually empties into Lake Crabtree, a popular county park and recreational lake.

Environmental investigators have expanded their investigation downstream and taken fish from Brier Creek and Lake Crabtree for testing. They have not received test results or issued warnings for Brier Creek or Lake Crabtree.

"We felt like people should know that we are sampling and are waiting for those results," Williams said. "It's a good distance away."

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