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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE " STUDY OF ST JOHNS RIVER FINDS POLLUTION WORSE THAN  
THOUGHT" NAS JACKSONVILLE FL  
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# Study of St. Johns River finds pollution worse than thought

(From Page A-1)

tants.

The fish and sediment samples were collected last year as part of the state's Surface Water Improvement and Management program, which has targeted the lower St. Johns River for cleanup. The fish and sediment were analyzed by the city's environmental laboratory as part of a cooperative agreement under the SWIM program.

The highest level of mercury found was in a bowfin caught in Rice Creek. It had 0.82 parts per million of mercury, higher than the state consumption limit of 0.5 parts per million.

Another bowfin from the Cedar River had 0.54 parts per million of mercury, and a largemouth bass in Goodbys Creek had 0.53 parts per million of mercury.

"It sends up a red flag; we don't know how bad it is," Schell said.

However, those mercury levels aren't high when compared to the mercury problems across the state, said Forrest Ware, chief of the Fisheries Research Bureau for the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission.

Fish in the Everglades average 3 parts per million mercury, Ware said, and some have been found with levels as high as 7 parts per

million. High levels of mercury can cause health risks.

Dioxin is a problem in Rice Creek, where the Georgia Pacific Corp. discharges wastewater from its paper mill operation. Dioxin is an unintended byproduct of the chlorine bleaching process.

In Rice Creek, every sediment and fish tissue sampled had detectable levels of dioxin. The highest level of sediment was 52.8 parts per trillion, which is "high relative to other paper mill receiving streams in the U.S.," the study said. It also said: "There may be a significant environmental risk posed by the [dioxin] contaminated sediments of Rice Creek."

The fish tissue study found the consumption of fish roe from a bowfin or largemouth bass could exceed the state's proposed consumption limit of 9 parts per trillion. The consumption of blue crab, which measured 8.2 parts per trillion in a digestive gland, may also exceed the limit.

Georgia Pacific spokesman Barry Greenberg said that although the study examined fish parts, the edible parts of the fish are within the safe limits. He said the mill has implemented controls to reduce the level of dioxin in its wastewater discharge.

In the Cedar River, the water

management district found the sediment is contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), PCBs and pesticides. PAHs are byproducts of the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels. PCBs were used as a coolant and fire retardant in electrical equipment, but they have since been banned.

Schell said the PCB contamination is probably related to a 1984 fire at a Westside warehouse when PCBs escaped into drainage ditches that flow into the Cedar River.

Every species of fish collected in the Cedar River contained detectable levels of PCBs. While the levels are lower than the federal consumption limit, the levels are likely to cause harm to the fish and other aquatic organisms, the study said.

At Goodbys Creek, Moncrief Creek and the Ribault River, the sediment samples showed high levels of PAHs. In Goodbys Creek, the level of PAHs were three times the concentration known to be lethal to aquatic organisms, making it "similar to some of the most contaminated areas in the U.S.," the report said.

The fish sampled in Goodbys Creek contained some pesticides and PCBs. The fish taken from Moncrief Creek and the Ribault River have not yet been analyzed.