

**Monroe, Bill; Hunsberger, Brent. The Willamette's poisoned heritage. Portland *Oregonian*. 17 December, 2000. (Reviewed by Tracy Maloney)**

This newspaper article discusses and evaluates the presence of chemicals within the tissues of Willamette River fish. Tests performed by the *Oregonian*, with assistance from Oregon State University's Department of Environmental and Molecular Toxicology, show that three species within a 26 mile stretch of the lower Willamette River contain banned industrial compounds at rates that could make them unsafe to eat. Carp, black crappie, and smallmouth bass caught between northwest Portland and Oregon City contained average PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) concentrations 10 times higher than the Oregon Health Division's screening level and three times the level set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The article then focuses on the potential human health effects of consuming these species of fish found in the Willamette. The results of the conducted study suggest that people who regularly eat fish from the Portland harbor might risk long-term health problems, such as cancer risks. The article mentions evidence indicating that prenatal exposure to even small doses of contaminants can affect a fetus' brain before it builds its own immunity just before birth. As a result of this alarming threat, state environmental health officials are considering stricter consumption warnings for the lower Willamette.

## **Critique**

This newspaper article is a very good resource for evaluating potential human health risks from the lower Willamette River. The study, being performed by the *Oregonian* and Oregon State University, provides reliable and valid results with a good explanation of the procedure. A general audience could easily follow the content as it is not full of complicated scientific language.

The article does mention one limitation to the experiment, which in the end could potentially make the values of PCBs within the fish tissues even higher. The study did not test for the presence of all 209 known types of PCBs. Instead, it focused on those considered by OSU scientists to be the most prevalent and toxic; these included DDT and DDE.

As a result, DEQ toxicologist Eugene Foster stated that the study may have underestimated the chemical concentrations that raise concern to consumers. Despite this single limitation in the study however, the newspaper article is a very good resource that accurately evaluates issues pertaining to human health risks from the lower Willamette River. Not only does it pose risks for those exposed to the fish, it also poses plans for affirmative action in keeping the public informed and healthy.

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