

Q 3. Did the [REDACTED] Plant use or manufacture PCB's?

A 3. First, it is important to note that PCB's and PCB containing products were never manufactured at the [REDACTED] plant site. PCB's were used as an added safety precaution in the Therminol Heat transfer systems, as was done in literally hundreds of such systems throughout the country.

PCB's were used as a heat transfer fluid because they are fire resistant, very stable and chemically inert compounds, as well as being good heat transfer media.

PCB's were (and are still today) used by countless industries from manufacturers to hospitals in applications requiring an extra flame resistant safety factor, as they were in every Therminol Heater unit until 1971 when we switched to a non-PCB heat transfer fluid.

Q 5. What are PCB's?

A 5. PCB's are compounds consisting of carbon, hydrogen and chlorine atoms. They are chemically inert, stable and fire resistant. These properties made them invaluable for their principal use -- as cooling and insulating fluids in heavy-duty electrical equipment, including capacitors and transformers.

For more than 40 years, the use of PCB electrical fluids was required in most high-rise buildings, schools, hospitals and industrial operations where the risks of fires or explosions were major concerns.

Q 6. What's the problem with PCB's?

A 6. PCB's are very stable chemicals. Because they biodegrade very slowly, they are environmentally persistent compounds. They can bioaccumulate in the fatty tissue (adipose tissue) of fish and animals including humans. While their persistence and bioaccumulation constitutes a concern, their mere presence and durability, per se, does not make them dangerous or a threat to human health.

In short term exposure/feeding tests, PCB's are not acutely toxic. They are classified by ALHA (American Industrial Hygiene Assoc.) as "slightly toxic to practically non-toxic."

Long term animal tests, e.g., life time feeding studies for rats have given equivocal and contradictory results.

However, several retrospective human epidemiology studies of occupationally exposed workers have failed to find any statistically significant chronic human health effects, except skin disorders such as chloracne and dermatitis which are reversible upon removal from exposure. No cancer, cardiovascular or neurological illnesses were found at a statistically significant level. In all worker exposures, levels of exposure were very high for exceedingly long periods of time, as long as 20-40 years in many cases.

Q 7. What are phthalates?

A 7. Phthalates are esters composed of phthalic anhydride and one or more of a number of alcohols. They are used in plastics to impart softness or flexibility to plastics. Perhaps the easiest way to help you identify them is the "new car smell" you're familiar with is the plasticizer in the vinyl of the car.

Q 8. What health/environmental problems do they cause?

A 8. Phthalate esters readily biodegrade and do not accumulate. They are not generally harmful to aquatic life at concentrations below solubility in water. While phthalates are on the priority pollutant list, these are much less environmentally prevalent than EPA originally thought and much less toxic to aquatic organism than EPA erroneously thought. While there has been some recent concerns about one phthalate and its affect on rodents at high doses, no evidence exists on harm to humans even after the many years phthalates have been manufactured and used.