

Launches Investigation by FDA

By ROBERT WALTERS
New York Times

The Food and Drug Administration has discovered a new source of potentially serious food contamination from the use of a chemical compound known as polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs - the carbond-based used in packaging 13 popular grocery products.

The items include crackers, bread cruetes and related products; macaroni and noodle products; pretzels, chips and specialty flours; prepared mixes; breakfast cereals; preserves and ice-

cream; and dried milk and dried milk products.

There are dried cereals and powdered milks, including malted milk; instant cereals; cooked, refrigerated, frozen specialties; rice, softener and fat; chocolate and cocoa products; ground cheese and cheese packages; dried fruits; and frozen fruit packs.

The FDA has known for some time that these foods that preliminary tests showed trace amounts of PCBs entered in the packaging materials and in some of the food items, but no confirmation of the problem has been provided to the public.

Instead, FDA officials convened a secret meeting on Sept. 11, when they discussed their growing concern about the allegation with representatives of the food and packaging industries.

In addition, FDA officials have instructed personnel in their 17 field offices throughout the country to conduct a preliminary survey of the packages and foods in 18 different categories to determine the scope of the problem.

PCBs are a highly toxic, extremely persistent chemical compound manufactured extensively by the Monsanto Co. of St. Louis for a wide variety of in-

dustrial uses. There is little available scientific data on their use on humans, but they are known to cause cancer, liver damage and birth defects in laboratory test animals.

Dr. William F. Ryan, D.D., Y., who has agreed for a ban on future use of PCBs, said the current law was "typical of the legislative failure to fully consider all potentially serious health hazards."

Ryan added that voluntarily, he would like to see more covered about the usage of American industry than in foreign countries.
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During the past year, PCBs have had to be taken out of their withdrawal from the market of whitefish, lake of chicken, turkey, eggs, fish, animal food, meat, by-products and a number of other items.
PCBs found in these cases, officials have been able to identify the contaminated products by identifying the source of the PCB leak and the handling of the specific items which came in contact, directly or indirectly, with the chemical compound.

The packaging problem is particularly a far more pervasive threat, coming out of the industry in an area in which the government's scientific knowledge and experience both are considerably limited.

For example, although the level of PCBs found thus far in food packages is considerably below the 2 parts per million tolerance level established by FDA for milk and milk products, fish and poultry, the FDA has never established any "action level" for PCBs in food packages.

Similarly, although PCBs are generally inert, the FDA is known to be concerned about the possibility that the chemical compound can migrate or transfer to the food itself. The FDA already is required to screen food PCBs in rice, wheat and processed wheat.

Regarding a Factor
Basically, the problem apparently in the product of a growing practice related directly to efforts to clean up the environment. The marketing of waste paper for use in packaging materials.

Some government officials have said the PCBs were contained in printing ink used in the original paper, a union which Minnesota has long prohibited the compound.

Another suspected source in the so-called "brown" envelope paper, whose principal manufacturer sold its first PCBs in last June. Tests on that paper have shown that it contains PCB levels as high as 10,000 parts per million.

The FDA first disclosed results on PCBs in food packages at a public hearing in St. Louis last Sept. 1 meeting. It was at that hearing that the decision was

made to establish an list of public knowledge of the illegality of its use apply.
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Company Reports Added
Among the representatives the food and packaging industry announced in the U.S. including were officials of the industry in Washington, D.C., who expressed their interest in the food industry, which is conducting tests to establish in cooperation of the FDA.

In addition, technical staff from a number of industry companies were present. One industry publication said the meeting was being called to "take cover," but in PCB opinion, objected to that characterization, stating that it was simply "about" a "medium" which was "uncovered to the public."