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PCBs

Some unpleasant news

The report that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) have been found in what are considered unsafe levels in mothers' milk in states is unsettling. PCBs have been found to be cancer-causing agents and have been commonly used in many things that come in contact with humans.

While there are lots of things used in manufacturing that can cause harm to people if they get in their systems, most, fortunately, are safely contained. It is the problem of our atomic age that some of the ways found of improving technology are also found to cause these dangerous side effects.

PCBs are a chemical substance, tasteless and odorless, used as insulators, sealers, heat transfer fluids, and as ingredients of inks, paints, lubricants and plastics.

Monsanto Co., the country's only producer of PCBs, halted sales in 1971 except for sealed machinery such as electrical transformers. But millions of pounds of PCBs have continued to pour into the country from foreign sources.

The Carolinas and Virginia were among the 10 states found, according to this new report, where mothers' milk had part per million above what the FDA calls the "provisional tolerance level" — 2.5 ppm. The N. C. sampling showed 2.6 ppm.

PCB contamination of chickens resulted in millions of the fowl being destroyed several years ago. The danger of the chemical has been reported by both private and government researchers. Their findings point to brain deterioration, and nervous disorders and stunted growth, findings obtained by experiments with rhesus monkeys fed PCBs. Some of the monkey mothers' milk contained 3 ppm of PCBs.

Advice given by one government researcher is that pregnant or nursing mothers should not "eat any fish from the Great Lakes or Hudson River."

Locally, we can add the advice, don't eat any shellfish from the Neuse River. It, too, is contaminated, according to the State Wildlife Division, and the millions of clams in the river could cause ailments like hepatitis.

We are not ecology fanatics, but the slow, systematic poisoning and contamination of the nation's waterways and rivers is, nevertheless, something we cannot help but deplore.

Somewhere along the line some folks will end up paying — and dearly — for abuses to the environment.

Excessive government controls, such as through the EPA, are not the answer. Business must have a good conscience over what its "business" creates in the form of hazardous side effects.

Waste disposal, as was predicted decades ago, is fast becoming one of the major problems for our society. Already there is a massive, floating mound of garbage — the accumulation of years of ocean dumping — inching closer daily to the New York-New Jersey coast.

A 1974 Geodetic survey of the earth's waters concluded that virtually not one square-mile of ocean was free from petroleum pollution.

The future is sure to bring more problems related to waste disposal unless the methodology of the present changes.

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