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F.D.A. PROPOSES A CHEMICAL CURB

Human Exposure to PCB's Would Be Cut by Rules

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WASHINGTON, March 17—The Food and Drug Administration moved today to reduce human exposure to PCB's, a widely used group of industrial chemicals thought by some scientists to rival DDT as a potential health hazard.

The agency proposed new regulations to help prevent accidental contamination of food by PCB's and to set limits on permissible amounts of the chemicals in some important food classes.

"We do not believe that current food levels present a hazard to public health," said Dr. Charles C. Edwards, Commissioner of Food and Drugs, in announcing the proposal. "We do believe, however, that the sources of PCB's in foods can and should be significantly reduced to prevent any potential hazard from developing."

PCB stands for polychorinated biphenyl. This is a class of colorless, odroless liquids having a chemical resemblance to DDT and a similar tendency to persist in the environment. PCB's are highly resistant to heat and have many industrial uses related to this fact. They are also used as ingredients in some paints, plastics, resins, inks, waxes, adhesives, rubber, asphalt and various building materials, according to the F.D.A.

Found in Packaging

The agency's investigation of PCB's in foods has shown traces of the chemicals in 67 per cent of food packages tested, but in only 19 per cent of the foods in the packages. The chemicals were found not only in recycled paper, but also in virgin stock, but the drug agency announcement said there appeared to be a "continuing and substantial reduction of PCB's in packaging material."

PCB traces were found in fresh-water fish and in some food animals, but the announcement said the sources appear at least partly to be environmental contamination such as discharges of wastes into water and air.

The F.D.A.'s proposed regulations would require processors of food, animal feed and food packaging material to eliminate from use any PCB's that might be the source of accidental contamination of edible products. The new rules would also prohibit from the recycling process any deliberate or evoidable inclusion of pulp that contained "any poisonous or deleterious substance which might migrate to food."

The agency proposes temporary limits on PCB content of several important classes of foods ranging from one-tenth of one part per million in processed baby and junior foods to five parts per million in the edible parts of fish.

Representative William F. Ryan, Democrat of Manhattan, who has urged for at least two years a complete ban on PCB's said today the F.D.A. action was welcome, but long overdue and incomplete as a means of protecting the public.

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