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STATEMENT BY

CONGRESSMAN WILLIAM F. RYAN

ON

A NEW ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD

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Today, I am calling for immediate action to prevent what may well be a major ecological disaster.

Recent scientific research has shown that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), ingredients in many household and industrial products, are a danger to the environment.

I am calling on the Nixon administration to mobilize all available resources to detail the extent of the threat and steps that can be taken to eliminate it.

I am asking the Department of Agriculture to ban the use of PCBs in insecticides.

Because scientists have found this new hazard in foods, I am asking the Food and Drug Administration to set food tolerance levels. The levels would probably be similar to the ones the FDA established for DDT, which is chemically similar to this new hazard.

I am also asking the FDA to consider banning this environmentally dangerous chemical. An immediate study should be instituted to determine whether a ban is necessary. Meanwhile, the FDA should require all products containing PCBs to be labelled.

I also call upon the Monsanto Company, which manufactures the chemical under the trade name of ARCCLOR, to cooperate completely with the FDA and the National Commission on Product Safety to determine how much of a threat PCBs are to the environment.

I am also asking Monsanto to release all its production figures for its three Aroclor plants. Scientists tell me that only with these figures can they intelligently gauge how much of the chemical is getting into the environment.

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Monsanto should immediately state, clearly and without equivocation, whether during the manufacturing process any PCBs are released to the environment, in any form; in what quantities they are released; and what control measures are in effect or being developed.

Monsanto should compile and release to the public a list of the uses of PCBs so that consumers can be aware of their presence.

Any manufacturer who uses PCBs should publish a list of the products containing these compounds; such products should be labelled as containing PCBs.

Until recently little was known about PCBs, even though its use is widespread. But now it is clear that disaster rides the winds in the form of this DDT-like chemical which is slowly but surely poisoning our environment, killing our birds, and poisoning our plantlife.

To the chemical industry, PCBs are a miracle ingredient in thousands of products from hydraulic fluid to plastic wrappings to insecticides to printing inks.

To scientists in several countries who have been carrying on independent research, PCBs are a menace that must be carefully watched before they claim human and animal lives.

The story of PCBs is an incredible tale of how man can pollute his environment simply by creating chemical compounds that will not breakdown in the wild-chemical compounds that are harmful to animal life.

It is also a tale of bureaucratic fumbling. The Department of Agriculture hasn't questioned the use of PCBs in insecticides because PCBs are considered an inert ingredient. Because of that curious classification there has been no attempt by the Division of Pesticide Regulation to ban the use of this chemical in pesticides.

While dangerous quantities of PCBs are sprayed into the environment as pesticides, this insidious chemical infects the environment through more roundabout means. Scientists are most alarmed at the quantities of PCBs they have discovered in birds, fruits, fish, conifer needles, human fat, and human milk.

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It appears that PCBs are getting into the environment in many ways, through the stacks of manufacturing plants, through the weathering or friction wearing of Aroclor materials, and through the burning of plastics containing PCBs.

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It is interesting to note that although scientists on two continents independently found PCBs in wildlife Monsanto questions the research. It is also interesting to note that, when Dr. Robert Risebrough and Virginia Brodine were preparing a report on PCBs for the January-February issue of Environment, Monsanto said the chemicals are only used in so called "closed systems" where they could not affect the environment.

However, in a technical report issued by Monsanto on PCB uses, it clearly suggests dozens of "open system" uses including insecticides and printing inks. Monsanto can no longer be allowed to police itself. Federal action is necessary.

Here is why federal action is necessary. Here's the nature of the physical threat. Scientists tell us that like its chemical cousin, DDT, PCBs cause birds to lay eggs with pitifully thin shells, shells that are too weak to protect embryos. The experts also tell us that PCBs have a negative effect on the reproductive capacity of animals.

PCBs also have disasterous effects on human beings. If they have contact with the skin, they cause chloracne, a serious skin condition. If inhaled, the result is even more dramatic and frightening. Among the symptoms are nausea, rapid breathing, loss of weight, and a lowered red blood cell count. More serious results are the deterioration of the kidneys, jaundice, and atrophy of the liver. In sufficient quantities PCBs can cause death.

The incredible thing about the PCB menace is that its effects on man and animal have long been documented by chemists and biologists. Suddenly we have come to realize that this potentially dangerous chemical is in the environment. We must banish it from the environment now--before it is too late.

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