In 1966 (Sweden) and in 1967 (USA) polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) were detected in certain birds and in other samples taken from the environment. Since that time, numbers of other reports have been published which indicate that the PCB's have been found in other samples of fish, birds, and water, etc.

Polychlorinated biphenyls are manufactured in this country under the name Aroclors by the Monsanto Company and in Europe and Japan under such trade names as Phenochlor and Clophen. Aroclors are manufactured by replacing one or more of the 10 hydrogen atoms in biphenyl with chlorine atoms. Theoretically, there are about 210 compounds which can be made by different substitutes. Biphenyl is chlorinated to a certain percent of the molecular weight. Thus, an Aroclor is a mixture of compounds, not a single chemical entity.

There were initially very few data in 1966 to indicate possible toxicological hazard from long term ingestion or exposure to small quantities of the PCB's. Therefore, a number of toxicity studies was started.

The polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) investigated were Aroclor 1242 (biphenyl chlorinated to 42% by weight), Aroclor 1254 (chlorinated to 54%) and Aroclor 1260 (chlorinated to 60%). These compounds are not very toxic acutely. The oral LD_{50}'s in the rat are about 2 to 10 g/kg.