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PCB An Environmental Threat

A family of commercial chemicals called PCB's (polychlorinated Biphenyls) has been accumulating in the environment in much the same way DDT accumulates, says a feature story in Environmental Science and Technology. PCB's are chronically toxic to birds, animals, and man, but it may be possible to head off this threat before massive damage is done, according to the author, Dr. Carl G. Gustafson, chairman of the department of chemistry at King's College.

even escape through the plant ventilation system into sewers or directly into waterways.

"So frequently action is taken only after it is evident that massive damage has resulted from a particular pollutant. In the case of the PCB's we may have an opportunity to resolve the situation before that happens."

Although used industrially for the past forty years, polychlorinated biphenyls have only recently claimed the attention of environmentalists, Dr. Gustafson points out. Since first detected in Sweden in 1966 and in the United States in 1967, they have been found in rainwater in England, in river water in Japan, mussels in the Netherlands, penguin eggs in the Antarctic, terns in the Arctic, waters of the Great Lakes, shrimp in Florida, cod in the Baltic Sea, brown pelican eggs in Panama, brown seals off the coast of Scotland, and in human hair and fatty tissue.

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CHEMISTS SEEK DATA

A group of 40 earth and natural scientists meeting in Rome is considering an appeal to the United States for ocean pollution information refused them by Monsanto Corp. Edward D. Goldberg, professor of chemistry at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography at La Jolla, Calif., said the action was being considered as part of a new program to get at the scientific secrets of marine pollution. Monsanto has refused all appeals to reveal production figures for polychlorinated biphenyls, better known as PCB's, he said. PCB's may be the second most abundant syathetic organic chemical in nature following DDT, according to Goldberg.

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