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Controversial PCBs May Be Associated With A Skin Cancer

Bloomington, Ind. — Researchers for the Mobil Corporation have reported that a controversial industrial and farm chemical, PCB, may be associated with a form of skin cancer.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) have been considered potentially toxic by the United States Food and Drug Administration but not officially declared toxic because solid evidence of a danger has not been established.

The chemicals have been discharged into the sewage from the Westinghouse Electric Company plant at Bloomington where PCB-filled electric capacitors are manufactured.

THE PCBs HAVE traveled through the city sewage system to Clear and Salt creeks and White River south of here. The streams have been declared unsafe for fishing.

State Board of Health inspectors also have found PCBs in the milk produced by some Indiana dairies and ordered at least four farmers to destroy their milk until the chemical has disappeared.

Details of the Mobil study were made public in the New England Journal of Medicine.

The Mobil report, termed very preliminary by the researchers, found that industrial workers heavily exposed to PCBs are more likely candidates for the skin cancer.

The group of 41 was less exposed to working with PCBs than the smaller group of 31.

The study was conducted at Mobil's petrochemical plant at Paulsboro, N.J. where a PCB product made by the Monsanto Company is being used in the plant's manufacturing.

DR. BAHN reported in the English Journal article that three cases of the fairly unusual form of cancer is unusually high, considering the small number of workers.

The doctor recommended that companies using PCBs should have a surveillance program for early detection of melanoma because survival rates are best when treatment is begun early.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has been making tests of the air and other work conditions of the Westinghouse plant at Bloomington.

THE FEDERAL agency also announced plans for a two-year study of the incidence of cancer that might be related to PCBs.

Indiana health board officials and Federal inspectors also have been conducting tests in the Westinghouse plant here.

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