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PCB found in mother's milk in Colorado

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LAFAYETTE, Colo. (AP) — Concentrations of the banned chemical PCB were found in the breast milk of a farm woman Wednesday, and a state epidemiologist recommended that she temporarily stop nursing her year-old son.

Preliminary tests showed Marie Darling's breast milk contains 1.8 parts per million of PCB, 3 ppm more than the U.S. Food and Drug Administration allows in cows' milk, said Anne Lockhart of the Colorado Department of Health.

Based on the results, Dr. Sandra Lapham, a state epidemiologist, suggested that Mrs. Darling temporarily stop breastfeeding her son Matthew. Lapham said she would conduct more detailed tests of Mrs. Darling's milk to find out whether the contamination was severe enough to pose a threat to humans.

The tests were conducted after Wayne Darling found 17 barrels of PCB on his ranch. One of the 55-gallon drums was leaking.

The chemical, called polychlorinated biphenyl, was developed in 1929 and used as an industrial coolant for decades. In 1937 it was found toxic to the human liver and in 1968, some 1,800 Japanese were poisoned by PCB-contaminated rice. The Environmental Protection Agency banned it earlier this year.

The state Health Department also released test results showing that egg and chicken-fat samples from the Darling farm were contaminated with even higher concentrations of PCB.

William Dunn of the department said there were 62.5 ppm of PCB in the chicken fat, more than 20 times the federal limit of three ppm. There were 2.3 ppm in the eggs, about seven times higher than FDA restrictions of .3 ppm.

"I'm sure there is some sort of safety problem here," he said. "We just don't know the extent of it yet."

Mrs. Darling has said she and her husband moved to Lafayette north of Denver "to live clean, healthy lives," only to discover "the most horrible thing in the world in our backyard."

The Darlings are vegetarians and raised chickens. They ate some of the eggs and gave some to friends.

An investigation showed the PCB barrels were put near the Darlings' barn by a relative of the owner, who thought they contained cooking oil. He was going to use the oil to weatherize fences.

Darling, a self-employed auto mechanic, said he left the barrels undisturbed for "a couple of years" after being told by the manufacturer, Monsanto Chemical Corp. of St. Louis, that they contained "a dangerous chemical."

He said he became alarmed by recent telecasts of PCB contamination elsewhere and called the Denver EPA office. The barrels now are surrounded by a chain-link fence while the state decides where to dispose of them and how to pay for it.

Monsanto has said disposal is the EPA's responsibility.

An unrelated case of PCB contamination was reported recently in a Montana meat-packing plant, resulting in the destruction of millions of eggs and hundreds of thousands of chickens in Montana, Idaho and Utah.