Articles

Toxic Chemical

Scientists Discuss Effects Of PCB

DURHAM (AP) — Scientists from throughout the world gathered Monday in Durham to discuss the effects of the chemical PCB — a toxic industrial chemical — on human beings.

Dr. Atsuko Yamaguchi of Japan, who has studied human beings who ate food contaminated by PCB, said the chemical caused still births, birth defects, retardation of growth in young boys and other health problems.

Yamagchi, a researcher for the Department of Public Health at Kyushu University, said there was an epidemic of a "peculiar skin disease which was later called Yusho" in 1966 in a Japanese town. He said it was traced to rice oil produced and shipped on a certain day.

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THE OIL was believed to have been contaminated with PCB which leaked from a heating pipe used in food processing.

PCB is a liquid with extremely high heat resistance. It is used in manufacturing when heat resistance is of primary importance such as in heating pipes and transformers. It has been used since 1930.

Yamaguchi said that of 13 pregnant women who ingested the rice oil, 10 delivered live infants, two delivered still-born infants and the child of one was dead from other causes.

The 10, he said, had "grayish, dark brown stained skin, nails and gingiva, and an increased eye discharge at birth."

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"AS THEY GREW older, the children's stained skin gradually faded. The majority of the babies were small for their periods of gestation," he reported.

Yamaguchi said, "Many patients with Yusho are still tortured by the disease even after more than three years. To cure them and prevent another epidemic, all possible worldwide cooperative efforts are highly desired."

Researchers attending the conference are from Sweden, Canada, the United States and Japan.

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