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EPA Vows to Curb Discharge of PCB

By William B. Mead
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The Environmental Protection Agency, acting on a federal task force report, said yesterday it would curb industrial discharges of PCB, a DDT-like chemical used as a machinery coolant which has caused birth defects in laboratory rats.

The task force, representing eight federal agencies, recommended in a 181-page report that PCB be "restricted to essential or nonreplaceable uses which involve minimal direct human exposure" but advised again an outright ban on the industrially valuable compounds.

The EPA said it would curb industrial discharges so that PCB levels in lakes and rivers do not exceed 0.01 parts per billion.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) already has proposed regulations designed to keep PCB out of food, and to prevent food plant machinery leaks like the ones that contaminated poultry feed with PCB four times in the past 18 months. A total of 487,000 chickens and turkeys was withheld from the market because they ate the contaminated feed.

PCB is an abreviation for polychlorinated biphenyls, a class of chemicals used for 40 years in electrical machinery and in some plastics, petroleum products and carbonless carbon paper

In laboratory rats, PCB caused skin and liver ailments and birth defects. In addition, the task force said, the chemical was linked with "adverse effects on certain forms of animal life" which encountered PCB in the environment.

Like DDT, which PCB semble chemically, the compounds are "persistent," meaning they retain their toxicity for years. "PCB are widely dispersed throughout the environment and . . . can have adverse ecological an toxicological effects," the task force said. It added there was no evidence that present PCB levels in the environment "constitute a threat to human health."

The task force said Monsanto Co., the only U.S. producer of PCB, already had acted to limit sales of the chemical. But, noting that the government imported products containing PCB, it urged congressional passage of legislation that would empower the government to ban or limit imports, production and use of all toxic substances.

"The elimintion of nonssential uses and prohibition of discharges from essential uses will result in gradual elimination (of PCB from the environment, the report said.

The task force included the ture Department, the Nation EPA, the FDA, the Agricul al Oceanic and Atomospheric Administration; the Department's Bureau of Sport Fish and Welfare's National Institute on Environmental Health Sciences; the Interior Department's Bureal of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and the White House Council on Environmental Quality and Office of Science and Technology.

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