Toxic Agent Is Found in Lakes, Rivers

WASHINGTON (UPI) — A toxic chemical used in plastics and paints has been found in unexpectedly large amounts, particularly in lakes in developed real estate, in 16 of 38 states sampled, according to government scientists.

The chemical is polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB), chemically similar to the insecticide DDT. It is widely used in production of plastics, paints, caulking compounds and hydraulic fluids.

The PCB findings were contained in a paper presented to the American Chemical Society in New York in August by three U.S. Geological Survey scientists led by Hans J. Crump-Weisner. The Interior Department made the paper public Tuesday.

REPORTING on a federal monitoring program concerned with pesticides in water supplies, the three said they analyzed more than 2,000 water and sediment samples from streams and lakes throughout the United States collected from January 1971 through last June.

"We expected to find traces of PCBs at sampling points near industrial centers, but were surprised to find detectable levels in samples from 16 of 38 states covered by the sampling," they reported. "A safe level for PCBs has not been generally accepted to date."

"We found PCBs in river water, some newly developed real estate lakes and at two U.S. Geological Survey stations located in relatively remote areas unaffected by man," Crump-Weisner said. "We also found lake and stream sediments to have relatively high concentrations of PCB residues. Organic extracts of every [illegible] samples collected in 33 states contained significant concentrations of PCBs."

THE CHEMICAL apparently enters the environment as a result of burning discarded plastics and other materials, and through leakage from the machinery in which the fluid is used.

In July, 1971, PCBs were found in a chicken feed supplement that resulted in the death of 165,000 chickens in Southeastern states. Other PCB contamination forced the destruction of 50,000 turkeys in Minnesota last October and 1.25 million chickens in Maine earlier this year.

The Food and Drug Administration limits the concentration in food products to 5,000 micrograms per kilogram or five pounds per million pounds. The Environmental Protection Agency recommended a maximum limit of 0.01 micrograms per liter, one pound in 50 billion quarts in river and lake water.

The states where detectable samples were found include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington.

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