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PCBs found in mothers' milk in test, EPA says

By JAMES PHILLIPS
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Measurable amounts of the suspected cancer-causing chemical PCB were found in the milk of nearly one-third of all nursing mothers tested in a 1975 nationwide study, the Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday.

The EPA said, however, it was unknown whether the presence of PCBs in the mothers' milk posed a health threat to nursing children.

THE AGENCY SAID it took 1,038 samples of mothers' milk, with 309, or 31 percent, containing measurable amounts of PCBs. It said only nine samples contained no PCBs.

PCBs, short for polychlorinated biphenyls, are industrial chemicals used mainly as insulating fluids in electrical equipment. The compound no longer is manufactured in the United States, and the EPA has proposed banning the use, manufacture and distribution of PCBs.

PCBs, which are widespread throughout the environment, have caused tumors, birth defects and liver ailments in laboratory animals. They also are a suspected cancer-causing agent in humans at low levels of exposure.

The women from 45 states involved in the study volunteered the samples while hospitalized during childbirth. The women were not identified.