The following nine pages contain a 2-day collection of stories which appeared in Gannett Newspapers -- the nation's largest newspaper chain, with 82 newspapers in 35 states and a total circulation of 3.6 million.

(The reporter, who incorporated Monsanto information throughout, regretted the headline writer's choice of words.)

The Sun

Sunday, March 22, 1981

PCB— deadly and pervasive

sunday special

First of two parts
By JEANNINE GUTTMAN
Sun Staff Writer

Fifty-two years ago it was hailed as "the wonder chemical" of the decade and was credited with protecting many a home, school, hospital and business from electrical fires.

Today, however, the compound has become one of the most notorious toxins in the country. Scientists have debated that distinction. Some maintain it causes cancer while others say it's no more dangerous than table salt.

The chemical is PCB, an acronym for 209 compounds known as polychlorinated biphenyls, which were invented to be used as electrical cooling oils.

Today PCB can be found in everything from microwave ovens to television sets, fluorescent light fixtures, electrical transformers and capacitors, refrigerators and air conditioners. Before 1979, PCB was also used in carbonless copy paper, printing ink, varnishes, paints, a number of pigments and dyes, textiles, sealants, fire retardants, natural gas pipeline compressors and plasticizers, which are softeners used in adhesives and adhesive tapes.

Although new studies have cast doubt on the widespread belief that PCB causes cancer in humans, there is reason to be concerned about the chemical because it "bioaccumulates" in nature.

That means that PCB, which is a close chemical cousin to DDT, does not metabolize and cannot be broken down by plants or animals. Rather, it moves up the food chain and accumulates along the way. The danger is that PCB could end up on your dinner plate in a high concentration in fish, meat, eggs or poultry.

And once you've ingested PCB, it remains unmetabolized in your body and lodges itself in your fatty tissues. The toxin has a half-life of 20 years. In other words, in 20 years' time about half the PCBs you ingest today will still be in your body, along with what you ingested yesterday and so on.

Scientists and researchers are concerned because no one knows exactly what PCB does once it enters the body. Nor is anyone certain how much of the toxin the body can safely absorb over time.

Not surprising, almost all Ameri-