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THE GAME BAG...

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PCB RESIDUES THREAT TO WILDLIFE

Before 1975, hardly one person in a thousand knew what PCB's were, or knew that they are used extensively in insulating products but are extremely harmful to wildlife.

But now, according to Nathaniel Reed, Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, "The presence of PCB residues in our environment looms as a very dark cloud casting an ominous shadow upon all our fish and wildlife resource programs which depend on environmental quality and healthy habitats."

Known chemically as polychlorinated biphenyls, their chemical stability, while excellent for heat resistance, resists decomposition into harmless components when released into the environment through waste disposal. They are found in such widely used items as hot liquid cups, paints, food wrappers, and other insulating products.

More surprising is the fact that PCB's have been in world-wide use for over 40 years, chiefly in electrical transformers and capacitors. Their toxicity has been recognized since the 1960's.

In St. Louis the problem became vivid in the summer of 1975 when fish purchased in Green Bay, Wisconsin were released in five St. Louis city park lakes by the state Conservation department. Six days later, the federal Food and Drug Administration notified the Department that the fish were contaminated with PCB's averaging 50 parts per million whereas five ppm is the highest allowable by FDA.

During the next several days, the state Conservation Department killed and removed the contaminated fish.

By coincidence, the only U.S. manufacturer of PCB's is the Monsanto Corporation, also in St. Louis. The problem was thought to be resolved when Monsanto voluntarily cut back its production of PCB's for their use only in "closed cycle" capacitors and transformers.

Senator Gaylord Nelson, who introduced a bill first to limit, then to ban PCB's, said this has not helped the problem.

"This is due in part to their indestructibility; to the fact that U.S. users of PCB's are obtaining supplies from foreign countries for non-enclosed uses, such as in hand soaps, copying-ink toners, and other products; and to the fact that PCB's are still being spilled or leaked, either accidentally or directly, into the environment," said Nelson.

According to an article in National Wildlife Federation's *Conservation News*, the Environmental Protection Agency has no comprehensive authority to regulate discharges of especially toxic pollutants. Thus its actions so far have been limited to reduce PCB discharges by getting individual sources to obtain a permit to operate.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has located PCB's in birds and fish throughout the

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United States in a very complicated analysis program.

According to Assistant Secretary Reed, ". . . PCB residues were found in all of the fish samples from 100 stations located in major river systems throughout the United States, and in almost all the bird samples taken since 1970."

Reed continues, "I am troubled by the exceedingly high levels found in fish from all our drainage systems, and I do not mean just the Hudson (where very heavy PCB contamination is reported) and the entire Great Lakes' system, but the Merrimac and Connecticut rivers of the Atlantic Coast, the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio rivers of the Midwest, the Columbia river system in the Northwest, the Sacramento in the West, Rio Grande river and other Gulf Coast streams, and even the Yukon in Alaska!"

Waterfowl are equally susceptible, with the highest residues taken from duck wing samples in the Atlantic Flyway, followed in decending order by the Mississippi, Pacific, and Central Flyways.

According to Reed, it makes no sense to pour millions of dollars into restoration of wildlife if they are only to be contaminated by PCB's.

In November, two private environmental organizations filed a petition with the FDA requesting that a five part per million action level be reduced and eventually phased out. In Canada, temporary guidelines for imposing a 2 ppm for PCB's have been established.

Reed cited the fruitless Congressional debate and delay in exercising federal control as "The irony . . . that our left hand is spending millions of dollars and thousands of man-years to establish a crucial resource while our right hand renders each new growth of this resource malignant." ■

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