

FDA INDICATES PCB TOLERANCE FOR PAPER WILL BE REDUCED TO 5 P.P.M.

Food and Drug Administration officials confirmed recently that the agency is planning to reduce the tolerance for polychlorinated biphenyls in paper food-packaging materials from 10 to 5 p.p.m.

In an Aug. 19 meeting with representatives of the American Paper Institute, Taylor Quinn, Associate Director for Compliance in FDA's Bureau of Foods, told the group that FDA is thinking of setting the new tolerance for PCBs in paper at 5 p.p.m.

The agency recently proposed that a number of the tolerances for PCBs be reduced (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, April 4, Page 6), but said the paper tolerance would be kept at 10 p.p.m. until a hearing is completed on a challenge of the current tolerance or the issues are resolved otherwise. However, in the proposal, FDA warned that it planned to propose a reduction in the tolerance for paper packaging materials as soon as the controversy over the present tolerance is resolved.

In the meeting with FDA, according to a memorandum prepared by Lou Brock of FDA's Regulations Coordination Staff, the API officials complained that the reduction in the tolerance "would hinder the recycling program," and emphasized that the FDA should be committed to recycling.

Acting Bureau Director Dr. Howard Roberts responded, according to Brock, that the FDA would consider the effect the reduction would have on recycling, but he noted that is not the agency's "major concern." Roberts said FDA's primary goal is to get the tolerances as low as feasible, emphasizing that the "tolerance can be lower and therefore (is) in the consumer interest."

Noting that paper customers want a guarantee that the paperboard meets FDA's tolerances, the API officials pointed out that the lowering of the PCB tolerance would result in an increased number of lot rejections, the memo observed. Roberts asked for a statistical analysis of lot rejections, Brock pointed out, and Dr. Donald Reister, the Bureau's Acting Deputy Director, asked for data showing the proportion of recycled paperboard being used by classes of food and how it has changed over the last few years.

Jellinek Says PCB Limit in Sludge Is Set at 10 p.p.m.

file PCB limit
as always
FDA

The concern over PCBs was also emphasized in an Aug. 23 speech by Dr. C. F. Jellinek, Deputy Associate Director for Technology in the Bureau, to a Conference on Composting of Municipal Residues and Sludges.

In order to protect public health, Jellinek pointed out that FDA has recommended that PCBs be limited to 10 p.p.m. in sludge used on land to grow human and animal food. Other limits recommended by FDA in sludges include 20 p.p.m. for cadmium and 1,000 p.p.m. for lead.

Meanwhile, FDA's proposal to reduce the PCB tolerance in fish to 2 p.p.m. continues to draw opposition in comments submitted to the agency.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection warned of the serious "economic havoc" which would be wreaked on the State if the agency goes through

with the proposal, and the New York State Legislature forwarded a resolution asking the agency to reevaluate the proposal because of the "tragic economic implications" of the change.

The Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce and the American Fishing Tackle Manufacturing Association also asked FDA to defer action.

NFI Urges Reduction in Tolerance by Species and by Site

At a July 28 meeting with FDA officials, the National Fisheries Institute suggested that if FDA must lower the tolerance, it should be done by species and by site. According to a memorandum of the meeting written by Jelinek, the agency officials pointed out that they have considered such a solution, but so far have been unable to come up with a satisfactory approach.

Support for FDA's proposal, which would reduce the PCB tolerance from 5 p.p.m., was voiced by the Michigan State Department of Public Health and Jacques-Yves Cousteau, who urged FDA to "resist special interest fish industry attempts to force a compromise." Commissioner Donald Kennedy answered Cousteau and thanked him for his comments.

Rep. Ruppe (R-Mich.) urged FDA to recommend consumer guidelines on fish consumption similar to those developed by the Michigan State University and by the University of Wisconsin's Sea Grant College Program.

"Consumption guidelines that may accommodate further changes in tolerances are considered deserving of your attention," Ruppe, who is the ranking minority member of the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, wrote FDA.

A study of PCB contamination of the Great Lakes by University of Wisconsin scientists is being financed by a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration grant. Other funds for the study will come from Wisconsin and industry.

NOAA said that the study is aimed at helping obtain data which can be used "toward determining the safety levels for human consumption of PCB-contaminated fish from the lakes."

Part of the work will include a feeding study with rhesus monkeys who will be fed PCB-ridden fish and monitored for adverse effects.

● FDA RECOMMENDS RELAXATION TO GEORGIA ON AFLATOXIN LEVELS IN FEED CORN

The Food and Drug Administration has advised the State of Georgia that it is possible to permit the feeding of aflatoxin to mature beef animals and poultry at levels of up to 100 p.p.b.

The action was taken by FDA after the agency received reports from the Department of Agriculture and several Southern States of serious aflatoxin contamination of the 1977 corn crop in some States.