

# PHYSICAL BEHAVIOR OF PCBs IN THE GREAT LAKES

Edited by

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## PREFACE

In December 1981, a group of 35 scientists from the United States and Canada met in Toronto for two days to discuss the physical behavior of PCBs in the Great Lakes. This book is a collection of papers, most of which were presented at that meeting. The issue is of obvious importance: PCBs are among the most notorious environmental contaminants and the Great Lakes are invaluable as a resource for fishing, recreation, transport, and as a source of potable water. But the meeting and this text have a deeper purpose. Perhaps from the understanding of the environmental behavior of PCBs in the Great Lakes will come concepts and information that will be valuable in elucidating and controlling the behavior of other contaminants in other aquatic systems.

The focus of this book is physical rather than biological, with the notable exception of Veith's paper on bioconcentration. This focus does not imply a lack of concern for the biosphere or for the effects or toxicology of PCBs; it merely represents an attempt to tackle a smaller problem of manageable proportions. Besides, the environmental fate of PCBs is largely controlled by physical processes, with biodegradation of lower chlorine congeners being the outstanding exception.

Many lessons have been learned from PCB studies in the Great Lakes. The importance of having reliable physical-chemical property data for individual congeners can not be overestimated. Analytical chemistry, as always, plays a key role. The need for individual consideration of each congener (and not a vague group of PCBs) is now obvious. Processes in the sediments, water column, atmosphere, and at their interfaces must be understood individually and collectively. Mathematical models can synthesize component studies into an overall picture of the contaminant's chemodynamic behavior and determine which processes and compartments are of greatest importance. Failure to reconcile environmental reality with a model (as occurs here with PCB volatilization rate estimation) highlights erroneous measurements or predictive equations. It

is ironic that PCB contamination has been the cause of a significant advance in our understanding of the Great Lakes and, it is hoped, will result in an improved ability to prevent future contamination.

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## CONTENTS

1. High Resolution PCB Analysis ..... 1  
*S. Safe, M. Mullin, L. Safe, C. Pochini,  
S. McCrindle and M. Romkes*
2. Influence of Volatility on the Collection of Airborne  
PCB and Pesticides with Filter-Solid Adsorbent  
Samplers ..... 15  
*T. F. Bidleman, N. F. Burdick, J. W. Westcott  
and W. N. Billings*
3. Vapor Exchange of PCBs with Lake Michigan: The  
Atmosphere as a Sink for PCBs ..... 49  
*T. J. Murphy, J. C. Pokojowczyk and M. D. Mullin*
4. Physical Chemical Properties of Polychlorinated  
Biphenyls ..... 59  
*D. Mackay, W. Y. Shiu, J. Billington and  
G. L. Huang*
5. Reactivity and Environmental Persistence of  
PCB Isomers ..... 71  
*W. B. Neely*
6. Reversible and Resistant Component Model of  
Hexachlorobiphenyl Adsorption-Desorption  
Resuspension and Dilution ..... 89  
*D. M. Di Toro and L. M. Horsempea*
7. PCBs in the Lake Superior Atmosphere 1978-1980 ..... 115  
*S. J. Eisenreich, B. B. Looney and G. J. Hollod*

8. Processes Determining the Flux of PCBs across Air/Water Interfaces .....	127
<i>A. W. Andren</i>	
9. Evidence for the Atmospheric Flux of Polychlorinated Biphenyls to Lake Superior .....	141
<i>S. J. Eisenreich and B. B. Looney</i>	
10. Role of Surface Microlayers in the Air-Water Exchange of PCBs .....	157
<i>C. P. Rice, P. A. Meyers and G. S. Brown</i>	
11. PCB Dynamics in Lake Superior Water .....	181
<i>S. J. Eisenreich, P. D. Capel and B. B. Looney</i>	
12. The Role of the Benthic Boundary in the Cycling of PCBs in the Great Lakes .....	213
<i>B. J. Eadie, C. P. Rice and W. A. Frez</i>	
13. PCB Accumulation in Southern Lake Michigan Sediments: Evaluation from Core Analysis .....	229
<i>D. E. Armstrong and D. L. Swackhamer</i>	
14. PCBs in Sediment and Fluvial Suspended Solids in the Great Lakes .....	245
<i>R. L. Thomas and R. Frank</i>	
15. Estimating Bioconcentration Potential from Octanol/Water Partition Coefficients .....	269
<i>G. D. Veith and P. Kosian</i>	
16. Steady State Modeling of Toxic Chemicals—Theory and Application to PCBs in the Great Lakes and Saginaw Bay .....	283
<i>R. Y. Thomann and J. A. Mueller</i>	
17. Model Simulation of PCB Dynamics in Lake Michigan ..	311
<i>P. W. Rodgers</i>	
18. Dynamic Mass Balance of PCB and Suspended Solids in Saginaw Bay—A Case Study .....	329
<i>W. L. Richardson, V. E. Smith and R. Wethington</i>	

19. Survey of Polychlorinated Biphenyls in Ambient Air across the Province of Ontario .....	367
<i>E. Singer, T. Jarv and M. Sage</i>	
20. Monitoring of PCBs in Water, Sediments and Biota of the Great Lakes—Some Recent Examples .....	385
<i>P. B. Kauss, K. Sun and A. F. Johnson</i>	
21. Volatilization of PCB from Sediment and Water: Experimental and Field Data .....	411
<i>T. J. Tofflemire, T. T. Shen and E. H. Buckley</i>	
22. Application of a Sediment Dynamics Model for Estimation of Vertical Burial Rates of PCBs in Southern Lake Michigan .....	423
<i>D. Weininger, D. E. Armstrong and D. L. Swackhamer</i>	
INDEX .....	441