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USDA, FDA Criticized

US Food Inspection Programs Are Rapped

By MURIEL ALLEN
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON, Aug. 4 — Neither the Department of Agriculture, nor the Food and Drug Administration routinely monitor the nation's food supply for residues of a toxic, persistent group of industrial chemicals known as PCBS and its manufacturer, Monsanto Corp., cannot control its uses which may be harmful to human health.

This charge was leveled today by a lawyer and consumer advocate affiliated with Ralph Nader's Center for the Study of Responsive Law before a House commerce subcommittee investigating federal food inspection programs.

Peter H. Schuck said public ignorance of the risks of PCBS (polychlorinated biphenyls) is the consequence of Monsanto's consistent refusal to provide information necessary for an evaluation of the presence of PCBS in the environment. In addition, USDA and FDA have been "less than fully candid in appraising the public of its PCB detection activities," Mr. Schuck said.

'Closed Systems'

PCBS have toxicological chemical and environmental similarities to DDT. They a manufactured by Monsa under the name Aroclor, w 10 to 20 million pounds p duced yearly, according Mr. Schuck. As their dan gerous qualities have become known, Monsanto has withdrawn them from the market except for use in "closed systems," such as heat transfer units in electric transformers, the witness noted.

When high levels of PCBS were found in poultry in three states in 1970 and 1971 FDA set an "administrative action level" of 5 parts per million (p.p.m.) below the PCB residues in food were deemed safe, yet this level "appears to have been established quite arbitrarily with little or no solid scientific evidence to support it," Mr. Schuck told the subcommittee.

The 5 p.p.m. level couples with closed system are supposed to protect the public but Mr. Schuck said there are "glaring defects in this theory." Monsanto cannot control PCB use beyond the point of sale, he explained. That PCBS are used as agriculture pesticides despite Monsanto' warning against such use.

Mr. Schuck also poo-poohe the "closed system" concep saying it doesn't exist in mo ern life. He cited the rece massive contamination of fis meal fed to poultry and swi throughout the southeast pl two other cases involving PC contamination this year.

The handling of the Nort Carolina case in which PC leaked into fishmeal at t East Coast terminal, Inc. North Carolina between Apr 30 and mid-July pointed o serious gaps by feder agencies in protecting co sumers, Mr. Schuck said. Ne evidence from "a confidenti but highly reliable source" i dicates that leaky equipme was repaired with patch which didn't hold up seve

evidence from "a confidential but highly reliable source" indicates that leaky equipment was repaired with patches which didn't hold up several times during the April-July period at the North Carolina plant, the consumer advocate reported.

Holly Farms, the nation's largest producer of broiler chickens, informed USDA of the large - scale contamination before FDA told the Agriculture Department which in turn notified purchasers of bad fishmeal. However, USDA said it found virtually no contamination of poultry slaughtered after July 23. This seeming disparity is the result of discontinuous contamination due to inadequate equipment repairs, Mr. Schuck concluded, not the absence of dangerous PCBS in the food supply. USDA has since said it will follow up his finding.

Only this year did USDA place PCBS on its checklist of possible contaminants after several contamination outbreaks. Although there is "no question" that PCBS in hens may be transmitted to the egg, according to Mr. Schuck, he said USDA is just beginning to test broken egg products such as egg mix and mayonnaise for PCBS related to the fishmeal episode. "A grand total of 40 samples will be taken," he added ironically.

'Inadequate Sample'

"Top USDA officials told me yesterday that they will sample 40 birds weekly, but I feel it's an inadequate sample," the lawyer said. "I suggested USDA go into the plant by legal means to check equipment repairs. They would know the possibility of renewed danger from a contamination cycle," he told the subcommittee.

At FDA 100 samplings related to the fishmeal incident will begin next week — almost one month after the agency first learned of the contamination, Mr. Schuck reported.

Mr. Schuck argued that federal meat and poultry inspection services should be reorganized as part of a new independent consumer agency because "there is no conceivable way USDA can avoid its conflict of interest between protecting the producers and the consumer. He rejected a suggestion by Rep. Paul Rogers, D-Fla., that food inspection programs go into a "properly built-up and funded FDA," because "FDA failed to catch the PCB leakage and its testing procedures are dominated by chemical and drug companies."

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