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Chemical hazard in mother's milk

Washington (AP) Poisonous industrial chemicals have been found in mothers' milk in 10 states in "worrisome" amounts, according to a federal official.

Dr. David Rall, director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, made the statement Friday as he chaired a meeting at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to discuss what he called "this potentially serious problem."

The problem is contamination of mothers milk by polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, a class of colorless and tasteless compounds with many industrial use.

It is feared that the compounds could cause cancer and birth defects.

The first findings in a national survey by the Environmental Protection Agency showed measurable amounts of PCBs in 48 of 50 samples of mothers milk tested in Maryland, Virginia, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

Those attending the HEW meeting heard reports of serious disease, brain and nervous disorders, stunted growth and deaths in the nursing infants of rhesus monkeys fed PCBs. Some of the monkey mothers' milk fet contained around three parts per million of PCBs.

This is "in the same ballpark" as the measurements found in the human mothers' milk, said Dr. J. R. Allen of the University of Wisconsin, who conducted the monkey studies.

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