It may cure more than Kepone

A drug used to treat high cholesterol levels in blood may aid in detoxifying patients who have been exposed to injurious levels of halogenated hydrocarbons. Researchers at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond last week reported that the drug cholestyramine has been successfully used to eliminate the pesticide Kepone from the bodies of workers who were exposed to the material in Hopewell, Va.

Dr. Philip S. Guzelian, an internist who specializes in liver disorders and is head of the research team, said an experiment involving 22 former workers exposed to Kepone showed that regular doses of Mead Johnson's Questran cholestyramine eliminates Kepone from the body two to three times faster than the body itself does. The drug, a powdery substance taken orally mixed with liquids such as orange juice, was administered to half of the workers on a trial basis. The remainder first received a placebo, but were treated with the drug later, when it showed promise.

Those 22 treated workers now have "minimal, if any, symptoms" of acute Kepone poisoning—although several are still classified as disabled.

Of the 22, Guzelian says that all but eight have undetectable Kepone levels in their blood, and the levels in those eight are "very low"—0.5 part per million or less. When first examined in 1975, some of those workers had levels as high as 32 ppm.

Results of the study were published last week in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Into the Intestine: Guzelian says the team tried to determine how Kepone is handled by the organ systems in the body. "We found that, in these workers, 10 times more Kepone was entering the intestine in bile than was leaving in stool," he says.

After determining that such amounts were escaping excretion and being recycled to the liver, the researchers tried to learn how the Kepone was moving. They found that there was a second site in the intestine that hastened the movement of Kepone across the intestine.

Details of this study, involving rats, are scheduled to be published in the Feb. 9 issue of *Science*. With this finding, he notes, it was fairly simple to narrow the choices for the proper binding agent.

Summarizing his approach, Guzelian says his team basically "took the lessons out of the physiology of the metabolism of endogenous substances, such as bilirubin and bile salts," and applied them to Kepone.

He believes that the method may also have applications in treating other types of chronic poisoning. "We are studying cholestyramine for use against PCBs in rats," he notes. The team is interested in other areas, including studies with mirex and dieldrin. And Guzelian believes polybrominated biphenyls (PBBs) may be investigated.

Compounds in addition to cholestyramine may be employed, he says. Anion-exchange resins may be useful, but the particular binding agent would, he cautions, be determined by the affinity between the agent and the toxin being studied.

Discrimination charged

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith has accused six oil companies of discriminating against Jews in corporate headquarters employment. The six: Exxon, Texaco, Mobil, Standard Oil of California, Gulf and Shell Oil.

ADL further charges that the firms' employment practices are "protected by the federal government's failure to enforce regulations designed to eliminate discrimination based on religion or national origin." The Labor Dept. confirms that investigation of these types of discrimination has not been given a high priority.

Ira Gissen, director of ADL's discriminations department, says the "classic discrimination" against Jews in oil-company headquarters includes "recruitment avoidance, promotion levels beyond which Jews cannot go, non-assignment of Jews to certain job areas, and stereotyped employment."

Oil Firms Rebut: The accused companies were quick to refute ADL's allegations. Standard Oil of California said it "emphatically denies" the allegations, noting that it abides by all affirmative action laws. Mobil says it also obeys all job laws, adding that it has a "longstanding anti-discriminatory policy in hiring and promotion." Texaco, which says it is an "equal employment opportunity employer," says it "does not make any inquires of its employees to determine what, if any, religious beliefs or affiliations they may have."

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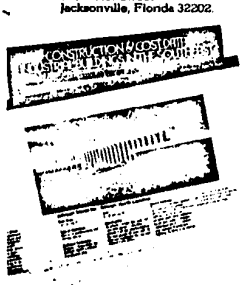
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