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June 23, 2000

Letters Editor
U. S. News and World Report
1050 Thomas Jefferson Street, N. W.
Washington, DC 20007-3827

Dear Editor:

The recent article "Kids at Risk" by Sheila Kaplan and Jim Morris (June 19, 2000) presents a one-sided and misleading view of the alleged connection between neurodevelopmental effects in children and exposure to polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The authors focus on only one of many studies examining this issue rather than presenting a balanced review of the growing body of literature. The health issues discussed by the authors are important and deserved balanced treatment. Further, the intimation that problems identified by plaintiffs in ongoing litigation are attributable to exposure to PCBs is not supported by the scientific and medical literature.

Authors Kaplan and Morris rely on a single study by the Jacobsons of Wayne State University to imply that PCBs are potentially responsible for learning disabilities. While this letter is not the place for a lengthy critique of the Jacobsons' work, the authors owe the readers the fact that other researchers have found conflicting results. As late as last week, U. S. government researchers presented the results of a large study which found no link between children's IQ and their prenatal exposure to PCBs.

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Additionally, even studies reporting associations between children's learning difficulties and exposure to PCBs describe the reported effects as subtle. In most studies the children's test results are in normal ranges, and often the reported effects are within the normal variability of the various testing tools. It is untested speculation to extrapolate any of these study results to suggest a relationship to mental retardation or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Children's health issues deserve careful attention. A more balanced approach would have been more helpful to parents and others eager to know more.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Kaley, II
Director, Environmental Affairs

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