

Poisonous Industrial Waste

Chemical Poses Threat in U.S. Despite Three Years of Curbs

By Morton Mintz

WASHINGTON, Oct. 28 (WP). —Poisonous industrial chemicals called PCBs are widely contaminating the environment—including some drinking water—three years after the U.S. government thought it had them "well in hand," a worried Environmental Protection Agency has revealed.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) at certain levels can cause serious toxic effects in humans. They threaten the food chain and, according to a recent unpublished report cited by the EPA, malignant liver tumors developed in rats exposed to one part per 100 billion of a particular PCB.

Introduced about 1830, PCBs have been used mainly as cooling fluids in electrical transformers and other equipment, as fluids for electromagnets, as heat-

transfer fluids, as hydraulic oil, and as plasticizers for waxes and adhesives. They also are used in paints, printing inks, carbonless "carbon" paper, and other products.

Because PCBs are almost indestructible, they persist in the environment when they leak into it from products that contain or are exposed to them, or enter as solid waste from manufacturing, as water effluents, or as air emissions.

Monsanto Stops Sale

Monsanto Corp., the sole U.S. producer, voluntarily had stopped selling PCBs except for use in closed electrical systems. EPA and other agencies took various other actions. Industry began trying to develop safer substitutes.

But the problem worsened. EPA's official enforcer, Stanley Legro said, chiefly because of exports from France, Japan and Italy, and because some Monsanto customers may have bought PCBs for unapproved purposes.

High PCB levels recently reported in fish in the Great Lakes area, the Hudson River Valley and elsewhere "underscore the urgency of the problem," Dr. John Buckley, an EPA consultant and former official, told the Senate Commerce subcommittee on the environment. PCBs impair the ability of fish to reproduce.

Contamination "is more widespread" and "at some concentrations are higher than previously believed," Dr. Buckley told Sen. John Tunney, D-Calif., the subcommittee chairman.

Threatens Resources

These concentrations "greatly exceed" Food and Drug Administration guidelines, thus "threatening our ecological resources" and "impacting directly on the jobs of local fishermen and on available food supplies," Dr. Buckley testified.

"At the same time, continuing PCB discharges are adding further to the total environmental burden of the chemical, which degrades very slowly indeed," he said.

Mr. Legro said the EPA has several reports of PCBs in tap water in the United States.

The PCB problem "will not be adequately resolved" unless Congress empowers the EPA to regulate manufacture and importation of substances such as PCBs by passing the proposed toxic substances control act, said Dr. Buckley, who endorsed the bill on behalf of the agency.

cc: J.N. Haggart

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