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PCB Contaminant in Food Is Traced to Its Container

By Richard D. Lyons

WASHINGTON, Sept. 29 (NYT).—The Food and Drug Administration has announced that it has found high levels of the chemical contaminant PCB in shredded wheat packed in recycled cardboard.

An agency spokesman said Monday that since the finding last June, the manufacturers of the cardboard and the food companies had stopped using the type of cardboard that caused the contamination.

The cardboard had apparently been made of different kinds of waste paper, including carbonless copying paper, which is made with PCB. PCB is chemically akin to the insecticide DDT and PCB contamination has recently been found in eggs, chickens, turkeys, salmon and fish meal.

Routine Analysis

A spokesman for the FDA said the PCB had been detected during a routine analysis of food products based on the foods that a 10-year-old youth might routinely eat.

A composite sample of cereal products showed that 0.4 parts per million of PCB was present. When the components of the sample were individually examined, the cause was traced to the shredded wheat. The spokesman said the PCB contamination of various brands of shredded wheat ranged from one part per million to 24 parts per million.

The spokesman said that the FDA was now testing 15 other food products packed in recycled paper to determine if they too were contaminated. The products range from frozen fruit juices to potato chips.

The agency's technicians found that levels of PCB in the cardboard packing ranged from one part per million to 633 parts per million.

Tolerance Guidelines

Tolerance guidelines established by the FDA for PCB in food range from 0.5 parts per million for eggs to five for fish and poultry.

PCB contamination in cooking oil in Japan three years ago killed five persons and afflicted 1,000 others with a severe form of acne. The chemical is also known to cause liver damage and malformations in birds and fish.

The substance, which is gradually being eliminated from industrial products, decomposes very slowly, thus lingering in the environment. Its use has been banned in Britain and is rapidly declining in the United States.

Japan Firm Guilty

TOKYO, Sept. 29 (NYT).—A Japanese district court found a leading chemical company guilty today of polluting a river and ordered damages paid to 77 victims of mercury poisoning.

Judge Keiichi Miyazaki, of the Niigata District Court ruled that the Showa Denko firm had polluted the Agano River with mercury discharged from a plant upstream from Niigata, a city on Japan's northwest coast. He found that the victims, seven of whom had died, had been poisoned by eating fish from the river.

The judge awarded the plaintiffs damages totaling about $10,000 at the current floating rate of exchange, which was slightly more than half of what they had asked. While low by American standards, it was a considerable sum for a court settlement here.

More important were the precedents and political implications. It was the first of four major court pollution cases to be settled. Showa Denko said it would not appeal the decision.

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