FDA Moves To Bar PCB From Food

By Elsie Carper
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The Food and Drug Administration announced new controls yesterday to limit human exposure to the DDT-like family of chemicals known as PCBs.

The agency said that it could not remove the toxic industrial chemicals from the environment, but that it was taking the steps it could to keep them out of food.

The amendment drew immediate criticism from at least one congressman who called the new controls inadequate.

PCBs in high concentrations are a known and serious health hazard. The effect of low-level, long-term human exposure is unknown, but studies on birds and animals raise the possibility of genetic defects.

"We do not believe that current food levels present a hazard to public health," FDA Commissioner Charles C. Edwards said.

"We do believe, however, that the sources of PCBs in

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FDA Announces Rules To Curb Poison PCBs

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food can and should be significantly reduced to prevent any potential hazard from developing," he said.

The controls would:

• End the use of PCBs in plants that process food, animal feed or food-packaging materials.

• Ban the use of recycled paper products containing PCBs for food packaging.

• Set temporary levels of "unavoidable" PCB residues in food packing materials and in dairy and poultry products, fish, infant foods and animal feed.

PCBs are a family of odorless and colorless, manmade industrial chemicals—polychlorinated biphenyls—that have been widely used for the past 40 years as electrical insulating fluids, heat-transfer fluids, and in inks, paints, lubricants, plastics and carbonless carbon paper.

The properties that have made them valuable to industry—they can withstand high heat and are highly stable—have made them an environmental hazard. Like DDT, they are fat-soluble and work their way up the food chain until they reach man.

Within the past year, there have been at least four incidents of PCB contamination of poultry feed. Hundreds of thousands of chickens and turkeys and hundreds of crates of eggs were taken off the market and destroyed. In one of the incidents, PCBs got into the feed from a leaking heat-transfer unit.

FDA said that it is impossible to eliminate totally PCBs from food because of their prevalence in the environment.

Edward's contention that the regulations "will adequately protect the public health from the potential dangers of PCBs" was challenged by Rep. William F. Ryan (D-N.Y.), who has introduced legislation to ban PCBs from interstate commerce, a move that would virtually eliminate their manufacture and sale. Ryan said that this is the only way to keep environmental PCB levels from rising.

Monsanto Chemical Co., the only manufacturer of PCBs in this country, now limits sales to closed circuit systems.

The controls, announced by FDA, will be published in the Federal Register today but will not become final until after a 60-day period for public comment.

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