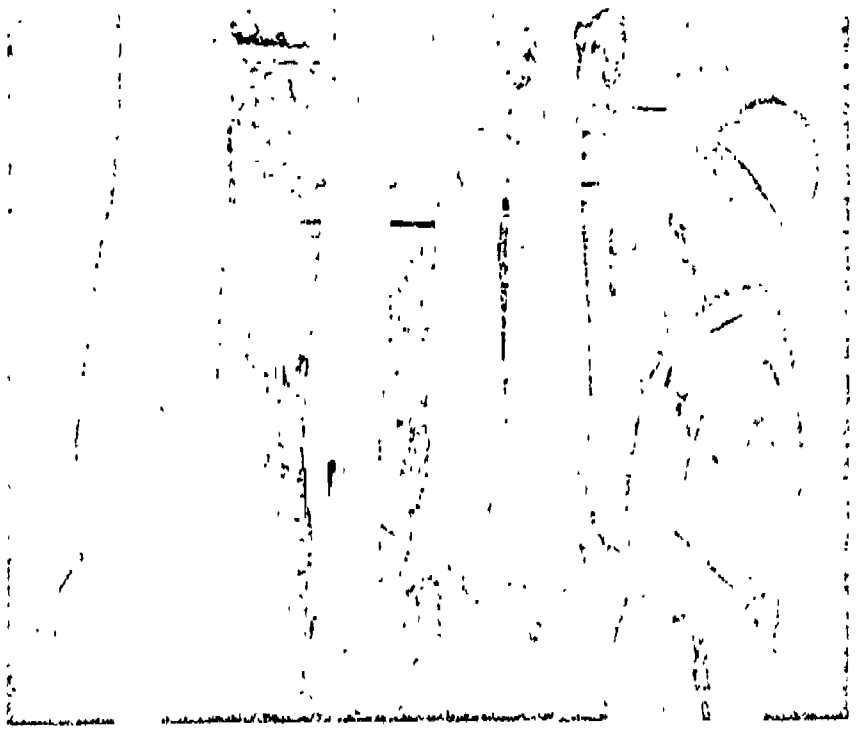


Federal meat inspector Richard Lambie approves hog carcass at a Boise meat packing plant

PCBs . . . No related sickness reported

By LONNIE ROSENWALD
The Idaho Statesman

Most Idahoans were more concerned than alarmed more confused than panicky when they were told a week and a half ago their food was contaminated with lethal PCBs

For 2 weeks PCBs a synthetic oil ingredient banned from use in 1976 turned breakfast into a game of chance as rumors on contamination moved from chicken eggs to bacon

Millions of eggs containing more PCBs than are allowed by law were sold in Idaho and other states during July and August before food inspectors detected the chemical in chickens in a random test performed at a Provo Utah slaughter house

In the space of a few days more than 300 000 chickens and hundreds of thousands of eggs were destroyed allowed to expire on supermarket shelves or fed to swine produced For several days a Twin Falls meat packing plant was quarantined while inspectors checked its pork

The U S Food and Drug Administration is unsure of the implications of any of the current exposure according to an FDA chemical specialist who is busy preparing an in house report on

The danger is not as great as — and it is a term of reassurance — has been said to be safe what is known about the chemical said the chemist who asked to remain anonymous

Because it is safe in the short term in the long term it can't guarantee for a lifetime

PCBs were widely used across industry from the time they were first manufactured in the 1930s until Congress banned the substance The chemical is an oily substance that can be

people who work with PCBs and breathe them most PCB related illness has been caused by PCB buildup)

Months after the poultry contamination began no one has reported sickness from eating PCBs a group of synthetic chlorine compounds widely used in electrical transformers capacitors air conditioners TV sets and paints — allowed in food and animal feed

In order to gauge long term effects health officials tested PCB levels in blood of residents of the small southeast Idaho community of Franklin home of the farm where chickens first showed PCBs in the Provo inspection and in employees of the Pierce Packing Co where PCB leaked from a ruptured electrical transformer into feed sometime in June beginning the PCB chain of events

Idaho Chief Health Officer Ed Gallagher assumed the public none would have to eat 3 to 4 dozen PCB contaminated eggs a day to get sick

The FDA chemical specialist said 9 eggs a day would equal the exposure which caused behavioral defects in offspring of laboratory monkeys

But these assurances were little more than speculation Despite a decade of research little is known about PCBs the FDA chemist said

We don t know if it s a cancer agent We don t know whether it has reproductive effects on humans he admitted

It s numbers game said Raymond Locke a chemist in the FDA s Toxicology Division in Washington

Environmental Defense Fund attorney Jacqueline Warren thinks health of cattle are understating the danger of PCBs

This is a toxic substance which has been linked with cancer birth defects memory disorders tumors and skin disease said Warren whose Washington based group has led efforts to

set levels for the amount of the chemical allowed in food The agency became concerned about PCBs after a poisoning incident in 1935 in Japan in which people who ate Yusho rice oil containing 2 500 parts per million of PCBs developed skin lesions

FDA regulations are based on the following data

- In 1936 skin lesions and nervous disorders were documented in workers who inhaled PCBs
- In 1973 74 Michigan fishermen who consumed fish containing 1000 parts per million of PCBs showed neurosymptoms of illness
- Laboratory animals have developed genetic problems tumors tiredness and possibly cancer from PCBs Over a 2 year period of PCB intake behavioral problems developed in infant monkeys

In clamping down on PCBs the FDA also had to consider the minimum amount levels were able to detect The agency also evaluated the cost to the food industry of complying with regulations

Feed and egg levels are set at the minimum detectable levels Poultry limits above the detection level are based on the feed level chickens given feed with PCBs are expected to show roughly 10 times the feed level

Levels found in the Franklin chickens and eggs were as much as 5 times above legal levels

The contamination led many to wonder whether such accidents could happen again The FDC claims there are 4 758 million pounds of PCBs contained in 1 200 electrical transformers as well as capacitors mining equipment and other machinery

There are PCBs present in what we eat every day the FDA says a 1972 report by average American consumed 10 micrograms per day 1 millionth of a gram of PCBs in 1 pound of

voluntary 'lot' meat inspection

By DON KENDALL

WASHINGTON (AP) — A proposal for overhauling federal inspection of processed meat and poultry items by relying heavily on voluntary information kept on file by the companies may be a major step toward making much larger changes in the nation s basic inspection program

One of the biggest advances in the inspection of meat and poultry at slaughtering plants came a dozen years ago with new laws that required all of the plants to meet standards "at least equal to federal requirements

According to Agriculture Department officials however the basic structure of meat inspection has changed little since the department assumed the responsibility in 1906

Technology affecting the production slaughter and inspection of red meat and poultry has advanced tremendously but USDA officials say many of the procedures and rules affecting the details of inspection are archaic

For example they say cattle are still supposed to be checked for diseases that were prevalent more than 30 years ago, some, such as tuberculosis still exist but not in the degree they did at the turn of the century

Modern feedlot operations turn out fattened cattle in much shorter periods of time using grain and other ages based rations that were not recognized 70 years ago

Pens of slaughter steers that go to packing houses are similar in grades and weights The same can be said about broiler flocks and beef

Thus although it would require legislation in Congress some USDA officials are hinting that it is time to alter the rules that now require inspectors to examine each carcass before it is approved for the consumer market

The idea of inspection by entire 'lots' of livestock is not new nor will it be popularly acclaimed if USDA moves toward this system Consumer groups and others will have their say before anything becomes final

But the recent announcement of USDA s proposal for a voluntary involvement by meat and poultry processors in the inspection of products like hot dogs frozen pizzas chicken soup and similar items is an indication of what some federal officials is an answer to the current some and costly problem of inspecting meat and poultry

About 2 500 meat and poultry plants are federally inspected and roughly half of those also manufacture processed items

The proposals apply only to the processing side of the plant such facilities as slaughtering operations would be

Basically plants that voluntarily operate a USDA approved quality control program would keep detailed records of their operations so that fewer federal inspections would be needed to monitor their operations

Assistant Secretary Carol Tucker Foreman who announced the proposal for voluntary quality control said the overall inspection program currently involves a work force of 9 000 inspectors and costs $207 million a year, compared to 5 644 inspectors and a cost of $91 million a decade ago

"By 1985 there will be a new need for the system to utilize 7 500 inspectors and cost $220 million Foreman said

There is no need to [illegible] happen The public can have efficient as well as effective inspection That must be our goal

If the proposal is adopted and the results are favorable the USDA will look at the possibility of asking Congress to make the quality control program mandatory throughout

Meanwhile USDA said in the official proposal the voluntary quality control system raises questions about whether the quality of inspection would be reduced and whether it would mean an abdication of responsibilities under existing federal meat and poultry inspection laws

"With respect to the first concern the department has good reason to believe that the quality of inspection would not be diminished but could even be enhanced, the proposal statement said

For some years it said USDA s inspection program has had experience in using sampling and inspection techniques based on both the manufacturing and processing

Procedures for inspection are based both on [illegible] from other defects such as bone and bone particles is a good example the statement said

In this procedure the department inspector randomly selects a prescribed sample each day to be tested quality of product to be shipped (normally one and to as high) and compares that sample for specific [illegible]

Foreman said one benefit of the revised program would be the release of a large [illegible] number of inspectors from processing plants so they can concentrate on [illegible] duties including the problem of chemical residues but [illegible] to show up in meat and poultry [illegible] of imported [illegible] [illegible] point

Although Foreman said a number of these proposals [illegible] Federal Register [illegible] Agriculture [illegible] Register and some others have surrounded the concept of [illegible] the [illegible]

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