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Subcommittee on Fish & Wildlife
Hearings on Polychlorinated Biphenyls
January 28-30, 1976
Remarks by Congressman Philip E. Ruppe

Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased that the Subcommittee has taken the initiative to examine this complicated and difficult problem. The introduction of toxic chemicals into the environment has been a source of continuing concern to the people of Northern Michigan and to the entire Great Lakes region. I certainly look forward to the testimony the subcommittee will be hearing on this extremely important question.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls which, along with others such as DDT, PBB, and Dioxin possess a very interesting set of characteristics. First, they are fat soluble. In other words, if your looking for concentrations of such chemicals, you do not look in the inorganic world, but in living organisms such as fish, poultry and human beings. Second, these compounds are very poisonous. The Food and Drug Administration currently indicates that PCB concentrations of 5 parts/million in food can be harmful to people. Furthermore, concentration levels as low as .3 part/million are set for similar chemicals by FDA with which we also have little known environmental experience. Third, such chemicals are extremely persistent. Because living organisms have little experience with them, it takes a very long period of time to break them down. In fact, some evidence has existed over the past few years to indicate the half-life of DDT and its relatives may be immortal. Fourth, such chemical compouns are very

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mobile. They move throughout the environment very quickly and can, as we found in Michigan with Polybrominated Biphenyls, become widespread rather quickly. Finally, to put the "topper" on it, these compounds tend to concentrate as they move up the [illegible] This provides an important source of concern for all of us because human beings fee high off ocsanic and fresh water food chains.

In my view, there is no more serious threat to our fishery resources and thereby to our citizens than that emanating from PCBs.

On the Great Lakes, the PCB problem is potentially the most devastating blow to sports and commercial fishing since the introduction of the lamprey eel.

The problem, as we will no doubt learn from the witnesses scheduled to a appear, is not confined to the Great Lakes, but is present in a great number of streams and waterways in every section of the country.

This, in my view, is a serious definite health threat to extremely large numbers of our citizens. I hope the committee will insist on hard, clear answers from those who manufactured the chemical and those whose responsibility it is to regulate the introduction of chemicals into the environment.

For example, I will be very interested to learn from both the Environment Proection Agency and the Monsanto Company why it took until only last month for these two concerns to take action against the harmful effects of PCB.

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Yesterday, in a curious piece of timining the Monsanto Company announced it would phase out the production of PCB. Late last month, EPA announced an "emergency," and largely voluntary program to stem the introduction of PCB into the environment.

Yet, Mr. Chairman, PCB and ome of its harmful effects was first identified in several water resource areas in 1970. In each succeeding year since the, there have been recommendations for stopping PCB and its deleterious effects.

I will want to know, and hope the committee will insist on knowing what it took until the committee called these hearings for action on the part of both EPA and Monsanto.

Many members of the Subcommitte may already be aware that in Michigan we have had a scare with PBB's a chemical closely related to PCB's. In early 1974, large quantities of Polybrominated Biphenyls, a compound use as a a fire retardant was accidentally placed in the feed additvies regularly provided to hundreds of farmers in the state. Eventually, scores of dairy herds had to be quarantined and finally, destroyed and the impact upon people who consumed large quantities of the contaminated dairy products is still not known.

I simply do not want what was, an accident in Michigan with PBB to become a permanent phenomena with PCB's because of their continuing large scale introduction into the Great Lakes Environment.

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I am also hopeful the committee will address itself to the question of how PCB was detected. Was it because there is an on-going, cooperative effort among Federal agencies to tet Great Lakes and other waters for toxic chemicals? Or was the presence of PCB discovered by accident?

If an effort is not underway to systematically and regularly test water supplies, such as the Great Lakes, and fishing resource areas for the presence of poisonous chemicals, then this committee should seriously consider establishing such a program.

Mr. Chairman, the committee could also be of great service to a large number of Americans who depend on their governmentment for assistance in protecting them against threats to public health.

I am specifically suggesting that the Committee ask the expert witnesses who come before it to look at ways of flushing PCB and other similar chemicals, like poly brominated biphenyl, from the human system.

Now that Americans know the problem of PCB ingestion by large numbers of citizens exists, our people will want to know what their government is doing to effectively advise them on its harmful effects.

Are there special diets which should be followed? Are there special periods during human growth which are especially critical for PCB activity?

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And, what can the Federal government due to stop the spread of PCB and other toxic materials?

In my view, the people of this country will not treat us lightly, nor should they, if we fail to exhaust every avenue that could lead to a lessening of this and other chemical health threats.

Mr. Chairman, it is the paramount of government at every level -- in Congress, in the Executive Branch and in the States to protect the public health.

Finally, I would caution the members of the Subcommittee that we ought not get involved in a highly technical and scientific debate over various aspects related to such chemicals. It must be our purpose to examine the degree of adverse impact, assess the role of the respsonsible federal agency involved, and thereby, insure that appropriate action is or will be taken to halt the build-up of these toxic compounds in the marine environment.

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