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Chemical Pollutant Endangers Young of Birds and Animals

PCB Has DDT Effects; Results From Burning Plastics

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WASHINGTON — A chemical you'll be hearing more about has been found in the nation's waterways, according to a Cornell University scientist. It's known by its initials, PCB, and is a byproduct of the combustion of plastics in incinerators and other open fires.

PCB has many of DDT's effects when it gets into an animal's system, says ecologist David B. Peakall. This means bad news for birds particularly, because research has shown that DDT and similar chemicals cause female birds to lay eggs with shells that are deficient in calcium, and therefore not rigid enough to protect the developing embryo until hatching time.

Peakall has found that both DDT and PCB set up reactions in the bird's liver which alter the sex hormone, estrogen. These substances, in addition to turning on and off the female's receptivity to advances by the male, also regulate the use of calcium for eggshell.

Human beings and other mammals bear their young alive—except for the strange duckbill platypus, but that's another story—yet Peakall believes PCB may also have adverse effects on the reproductive functions of the higher animals.