The redwood forests span the southern coast of Oregon, where a commercial bakery recently discovered that it had purchased — and now must destroy — 50,000 PCB-contaminated eggs.

The Gulf Stream waters wash the west coast of Florida, where a chemist recently found a marked decline in the potential fertility of young men that appeared to be related in part to PCB traces found in the subjects' sperm.

This month's reports of PCB contamination aren't limited to those two states. In Franklin, Idaho, a poultry company is in the process of destroying more than 300,000 contaminated chickens and more than one million poisoned eggs.

In Clinton, Iowa, a packing company is destroying the meat from 28,000 more chickens, all purchased from the Idaho firm. In Richmond, Utah, PCB traces have been found in 75,000 frozen cakes that also must be destroyed.

In Billings, Mont., federal health officials have converged on a hog processing firm whose meat meal byproduct is suspected of being the source of the most recent outbreak of widespread PCB contamination.

The government investigation already encompasses most of the country's northwest quadrant because the Montana company sells 100,000 to 200,000 pounds of animal feed weekly throughout Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Food products confiscated, destroyed or banned by federal officials because of PCB contamination discovered in the early 1970s include the following: More than 400,000 eggs in Virginia and North Carolina, 250,000 pounds of turkey roll in South Carolina, 50,000 turkeys in Minnesota and 350,000 chickens in Maine, New York and North Carolina.

Meanwhile, the company that was the sole U.S. producer and marketer of PCBs for almost half a century is busily propagandizing the public about the real and imagined glories of industrial chemicals.

The Monsanto Co. of St. Louis finally halted its production of PCBs (sold under the Aroclor trade name) in the autumn of 1977 — but not until it had produced enough of the toxic liquid to float an entire navy.

Monsanto has claimed in recent years that it always was concerned about the dangers posed by PCBs and "has made very effort" to keep the public informed about the hazards.

But when the threat of PCBs was first disclosed in the early 1970s, Monsanto denigrated those revelations as mere "political charges and sensational headlines . . . scare tactics and sensational reporting."

The company now has mounted an ambitious and expensive advertising campaign designed to demonstrate that chemicals are valuable, if not indispensable, to modern life.

Monsanto's ubiquitous television commercials extol the virtues of chemicals ranging from preservatives to firefighting compounds. Never mentioned, however, is the product that will haunt the nation for many decades to come — PCBs.

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Martha Angle and Robert Walters

A prevalence of PCBs

WASHINGTON (NEA) — With apologies to composer Woody Guthrie, here's a new line for one of the country's best-known folk songs: "From the redwood forests to the Gulf Stream waters, this land is soaked with PCB."

PCB's are polychlorinated biphenyls, a family of toxic, highly persistent industrial chemicals that have caused liver damage and birth defects in laboratory animals.

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