HEW NEWS

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National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20014

Bo Hosford
Office: 301-496-2535

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An international conference to assess existing knowledge on polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) will be held in North Carolina December 20-21. It is sponsored by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS).

Dr. David P. Rall, NIEHS director, said the emphasis will be on how PCBs can affect human beings. Conferees will discuss the chemistry of the PCBs, how they are disseminated in the environment, instances of contamination and the results in wildlife and humans, and possible alternatives to the use of PCBs.

NIEHS is a component of HEW's National Institutes of Health.

The PCBs have been used for more than 40 years. They are liquids that have unusual physical and chemical characteristics. One of these is extreme heat resistance. They are therefore useful in providing greater safety where fire protection is a primary consideration, as in transformers, capacitors, hydraulic fluids and for other purposes.

Discovery of PCBs in the environment (where they do not occur naturally) and in the human food chain has led to scientific concern over these possible biological effects.

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On September 1, 1971, an Interdepartmental Task Force was established to coordinate government activities to facilitate the exchange of information and to do all else possible to bring government resources to bear in defining and dealing with the problem.

Scientists from the United States, Canada, Sweden, The Netherlands and Japan are scheduled to speak. About 90 are expected to attend.

The conference will be held at Quail Roost Conference Center, Rougemont, N.C. The location was chosen because of its proximity to NIEHS at Research Triangle Park, N.C.

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