Chemical Like DDT Hazardous

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Dispatch To The Sentinel

WASHINGTON — Officials of seven federal agencies are expressing increasing concern over the possible health hazards of a colorless, odorless liquid named PCB that some scientists hold to be even more injurious than DDT, which it closely resembles in chemistry and frequency of appearance.

In the past few months large amounts of the PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, have been found in chickens, eggs, turkeys, salmon and fish meal.

THIS LED to the formation two weeks ago by the President's office of science and technology and his council on environmental quality of a task force to investigate the presence of PCB in food and other compounds.

Since mid-August at least three scientific meetings have extensively discussed PCB, including a session of Nobel laureates in Goteborg, Sweden. The scientists concluded that PCB "concentrations may reach levels sufficient to damage ecosystems irreversibly on a worldwide scale before the damage is recognized."

"Their entry into the marine environment should be curtailed to every practical extent, even if this requires constrictions on their production and use," the Goteborg statement added.

WILLIAM D. Ruckelshaus, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, noted in an interview Wednesday that "it is the sudden accumulation of information about PCB that gives us concern because it is used so widely in the environment."

EPA is part of the PCB task force, which also includes representatives of the departments of commerce, agriculture, and interior, and the food and drug administration.

Dr. Charles C. Edwards, commissioner of the FDA, also said in an interview that the task force had been convened at his agency's request "because we realized that PCB was a lot bigger problem than that of the FDA alone."

JAMES D. Grant, the deputy FDA commissioner, said "we want PCB out of the food supply but we don't yet regard it as an imminent hazard to health."

PCB has the consistency of molasses and an amazing ability to stand up under heat. Because it can withstand temperatures of up to 1,600 degrees farenheit, POB is used in heat-exchange systems. It also is being used in non-carbon copying papers, paints and pesticides.

The chemical has been in use for 40 years and, because, like DDT, it resists decomposition, persists in the environment for years. DDT and PCB are so alike chemically that until several years ago it was almost impossible to detect one from the other by microchemical analysis.

Because of this formerly undetable difference, much of the environmental contamination by DDT is believed to have been caused by a combination of DDT and PCB.

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