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Toxic chemical permeates nation

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WASHINGTON — 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 stained with PCB."

PCBs are polychlorinated biphenyls, a family of nearly 1,000 highly persistent industrial chemicals that have caused liver damage and birth defects in laboratory animals.



"The redwood forests span the southern coast of Oregon, where a commercial bakery recently discovered that its bun [illegible] — and now must destroy [illegible] PCB-contaminated eggs.

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

"This month's reports of PCB contamination aren't limited to these two states. In Franklin, Idaho, a poultry company is in the process of destroying more than 500,000 contaminated chickens and more than 1 million potential eggs.

"In Clinton, Iowa, a packing company is destroying the meat from 25,000 more chickens, all purchased from the Idaho firm. In Richmond, Utah, PCB [illegible] have been found in 70,000 [illegible] cows that also must be destroyed.

"In Hillman, Mont., federal health officials [illegible] on a hog processing firm whose meat byproducts are 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 between the Montana [illegible] some 100,000 to 200,000 pounds of animal feed [illegible] throughout Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

"The Florida experiment, described at the mid-September annual meeting of the American Chemical Society, led researchers to conclude that 25 percent of a group of male college students [illegible] in the study suffered [illegible] genital sterility.

Other scientists reported at the American Chemical Society convention that tons of PCBs [illegible] from the air each year into the Great Lakes.

Food products [illegible], destroyed or [illegible] by federal officials because of PCB contamination discovered in the early 1970s include the following: more than 600,000 eggs in Virginia and North Carolina; 800,000 pounds of turkey roll in South Carolina; 30,000 [illegible] in Minnesota and 250,000 chickens in Maine, New York and North Carolina.

There's more. New York's Hudson River, Alabama's streams and Lake Michigan were found to have such high levels of PCBs that fishing in those waters was banned. Milk contamination has been reported in West Virginia and Ohio.

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 chemistry.

[illegible] Co. of St. Louis finally [illegible] Food Co. for the Arcadia trade name) in the autumn of 1977 — but not until it had produced enough of the toxic liquid to fill an entire navy.

Monsanto has claimed in recent years that it always [illegible] about the dangers posed by PCBs and "has made every 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 [illegible] charges and unsubstantiated [illegible] ... scare tactics and sensational reporting."

The company now has resumed its ambitious and expensive advertising campaign designed to convince people that chemicals are valuable. If not indispensible, to modern life.

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



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