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PCBs discovered in family cow's milk

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The Indiana State Board of Health has found PCBs in milk from a cow that has grazed on pastureland where city sewage sludge was spread as a fertilizer last fall.

Ron and Sara Nehrig, a Monroe County couple whose farm is located on Fairfax Road, said a state official notified them Monday morning that a sample of milk from their family cow contained 5 parts per million (ppm) of Arocior 1016, a poly chlorinated biphenyl used at the Bloomington Westinghouse plant to fill electrical capacitors.

The 5 ppm level is twice the level of 2.5 ppm considered safe by the Food and Drug Administration.

"What really upsets me is that a week ago they called us and said there weren't any PCBs in our milk, and now this," said Sara Monday night following a discussion of local PCB pollution at the Environmental Quality and Conservation Commission (EQCC).

She said the first notification came after the state tested the family cow's milk for PCB 1254, a PCB that was not used by Westinghouse.

Ron Nehrig said he spread sludge on both pasture and garden land last November, just before the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) listed Bloomington as a possible PCB pollution spot during the national PCB conference at Chicago.

"I waited a long time, checking to see if it was safe," said Nehrig.

"We asked about heavy metals and other pollutants, but nobody knew about PCBs," said Sara. "I'm not so concerned about what they are going to do to me, but I have a three-year-old daughter and I feel it's going to affect her."

Close to tears as she told reporters of her family's plight, she said: "I don't feel we can live there anymore . . . We shouldn't have to bear the brunt of this by ourselves."

The Nehrigs, like other farmers in the area, spread treated city sewage sludge at the rate of 25 tons per acre on their garden and 12 tons per acre on the cow pasture.

Tests by the city and state found 105 ppm and 240 ppm of PCB in dry sludge produced at the south, Winston-Thomas sewage treatment plant.

"I feel Westinghouse is to blame . . . somebody is!" Sara Nehrig told reporters last night.

About four acres of land were covered with the PCB-contaminated sludge.

She said when the state health authorities relayed the milk contamination news Monday, they did not advise about possible problems or even if the milk was safe to drink.

The Nehrigs were among those featured in a *National Geographic* article about southern Indiana's uplanders. A picture in that magazine showed the PCB-contaminated cow and the Nehrigs' three-year-old daughter, Rachel.

"There are people in this community who have used this stuff (city sewage sludge) on gardens for 20 years.

"I'd like to see more testing of different types of PCBs very soon. We know we've got it, now we want to know what it's going to do to us," said Sara Nehrig.

Tests on Arocior 1016 by Monsanto, relayed by Westinghouse last week, claim that this form of PCB is more biodegradable than other forms of the compound. One study, said the company, shows that once PCBs are removed from test animals' food, the concentrations in the animals' adipose tissue decreases from near 25 ppm to less than five ppm in about 70 days.

In the Monsanto experiment with rats using Arocior 1016, the PCB was mixed with food at a rate of 25 ppm.

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