TURNAROUND? Bay City Times

Professor says PBB, PCB effects 'could be harmful, could be helpful'

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EAST LANSING (AP) – Some people might be protected against certain forms of cancer by PBB and PCBs, two chemicals which have plagued Michigan, says a Michigan State University pharmacology professor.

But Jay Goodman cautioned Thursday that little is known about any chance the chemicals will protect Michigan residents – and he indicated that, indeed, they may cause cancer in some people.

If the chemicals do protect against any cancer, they might affect only certain cancers in certain people, and at certain dose levels of whatever substance threatened to cause the cancer in the first place, Goodman said.

Other people may have entirely different reactions, he added.

"You can't predict anything," Goodman said at a Michigan State seminar on news reporting about environmental issues.

But laboratory tests of rats and mice show that certain doses of some chemicals have protective effects against some cancers, he said. He said polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, and polybrominated biphenyl, or PBB, are among those which appear to protect against some forms of cancer.

PCBs are industrial chemicals now banned in Michigan. They were once widely used as insulators in electrical transformers and other equipment.

PBB was a fireproofing agent accidentially mixed with livestock feed in 1973 and distributed across Michigan in the worst agricultural contamination in the nation's history. Tests have shown that nearly all Michigan residents have at least trace amounts of PBB in their bodies.

Goodman said that some chemicals, including PCBs and PBB, seem to have a protective effect against cancer if given to animals before a cancer-causing substance is administered.

But, in a "good news, bad news" situation, the chemical might actually promote the growth of cancer if given after the animal is administered the carcinogen.

And Goodman said that scientists are unsure if PCBs and PBB are cancer-causers themselves in certain amounts.

"They (people) should not believe they have been poisoned," Goodman said. "It (the effect of chemicals) could be harmful, it could be helpful, it could be neutral."

Goodman said the animal tests which revealed the possible cancer-protecting function of PBB and PCBs centered on liver and breast cancer.

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