U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION
Rockville, Maryland 20852

John T. Walden 301/443-4177
(Home phone 301/249-9148)

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Six Federal agencies today agreed to establish an inter-departmental task force to coordinate a government-wide investigation into PCB contamination of food and other products.

PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls) are a family of chemicals widely used for industrial purposes. For at least 40 years, the substances have been used in the manufacturing process or as actual components of many products, including some plastics and adhesives, printing inks, electrical and building materials, heat exchange mechanisms, and paper products.

The task force will be coordinated through the Office of Science and Technology and the Council on Environmental Quality. Other members are the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The task force was created at a meeting called September 3, 1971, by the FDA to share information gathered by that Agency and by NIEHS. Both Agencies have been involved for some time in follow-up investigations of several industrial incidents which have resulted in low-level PCB adulteration of various food products.

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The PCB Task Force will have two objectives:

-- To insure maximum, effective coordination of government response against specific and preventable PCB contamination as such problems may arise;

-- To develop a long-range strategy for coordinating scientific resources to better define the PCB problems and its possible implications for human health.

Based on current scientific knowledge, the government sees no imminent threat to the safety of the food supply or to the public health from this broadly used family of industrial chemicals. Enforcement activities by FDA, the USDA, and other agencies of government are adequate to protect the public health from the occasional accident which can result in short-term but controllable human exposure to PCB's in the food supply. Still unknown, however, and more difficult to assess on the basis of current information, is the size and significance of long-term, low-level human exposure to PCB's.

The PCB Task Force is intended to expedite the search for answers and solutions by bringing together the combined resources and authorities of cooperating government agencies.

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