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FDA TO PRESENT EIGHT WITNESSES AT PCB HEARING

The Food and Drug Administration's Bureau of Foods has listed eight witnesses it will present at the public hearing on the American Paper Institute's challenge to the 10 p.p.m. tolerance for polychlorinated biphenyls in food-packaging paper and paperboard (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Sept. 1, Page 29).

From the Bureau itself, the witnesses will be: (1) Dr. Albert C. Kolbye, Jr., Associate Bureau Director for Sciences; (2) Dr. Herbert Blumenthal, Acting Director of the Division of Toxicology; (3) Dr. Charles F. Jelinek, Director of the Division of Chemical Technology; (4) Paul E. Corneliussen, of the Division of Chemical Technology; and (5) Elizabeth J. Campbell of the Division of Regulatory Guidance.

Three witnesses from outside the Bureau will be: (1) John R. Wessel, Scientific Coordinator in the Office of the FDA Associate Commissioner for Compliance; (2) Dr. Renate D. Kimbrough, of the Center for Disease Control; and (3) Dr. James R. Allen of the University of Wisconsin Medical School.

In a narrative statement of FDA's case, Acting Bureau Director Dr. Howard Roberts said the witnesses will demonstrate that PCBs "are widespread and injurious environmental contaminants," which have been shown to be "toxic to humans," which "create both chronic and acute toxic effects in a number of animal species. . .," and which are "a potential carcinogen."

He wrote that "evidence at the hearing will establish that the vast majority of recycled paperboard is currently able to meet the 10 p.p.m. tolerance level."

Saying that the primary concern is migration to food, Roberts said FDA's "barrier exemption" gives "the paper packaging industry a viable alternative to achieve compliance" and that it "should reduce the alleged economic impact on the paper industry of the PCB tolerance."

The Bureau Director said FDA's evidence will establish that paper packaging material is a "demonstrated source" of PCB contamination of food. He said that examination of thousands of samples of fruits, vegetables and grain showed that only 0.05% contained detectable PCBs, while PCB residues have been detected in packaged foods. He said the residues "analytically resemble Aroclor 1242" and probably "originated from the paperboard used to package food."

Roberts wrote that the results of paper industry-sponsored studies on barriers show "that the presence of PCBs in paper food packaging materials can cause the food contents of the packaging to become contaminated."