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EPA SHOULD BE SELECTIVE in approving manufacture of chemicals that build up in body fat or are environmentally persistent, a National Academy of Sciences panel concluded after reviewing the present state of affairs with PCBs. Panel recommended EPA consider permitting marketing and manufacture of lipophilic persistent chemicals only if no suitable alternatives are available, and then only if an advanced level of testing on the compound has been performed. Any compounds essential but toxic should be allowed for restricted uses only, panel stated (see related story on page 269).

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EPA TESTS WOULD NOT HAVE UNCOVERED TOXIC EFFECTS OF PCBs, NAS WARNS

Some toxic effects of PCBs are not detected by current Environmental Protection Agency-approved tests, and as a result, if these chemicals had not been banned by the Toxic Substances Control Act, manufacturers would probably still be permitted to market them today, a National Academy of Sciences panel concluded in a report released last month.

That panel, headed by Dr. Alfred Beeton of the University of Michigan, was convened at EPA's request in 1978 to study the health and environmental effects of PCBs. Panel found that most of the health effects of PCBs, excluding occupational health effects, would not be detected under the agency's proposed major testing guidance for the Federal pesticide law or TSCA. Panel explained that most PCB effects are subtle effects, such as reproductive problems, but that EPA's standards are designed "to detect only gross intoxication." "Subtle effects are not considered at all in the scheme proposed for TSCA, and only peripherally in these drafted for FIFRA," the panel concluded. The NAS report recommends that EPA's testing standards be written to "stress assessments of subtle health hazards."

In other recommendations, NAS suggested that EPA develop more cost effective methods for PCB disposal. Panel noted that EPA's proposed PCB disposal rules would hike disposal costs from $33/kg to $133,000/kg, but would increase PCB control by only .1% over the current control costs. Panel cited Food and Drug Administration's method of setting the lower PCB tolerance in fish as an example of a more cost-effective regulation that controlled dietary intake and human health effects than some of EPA's more costly proposed regulations on use and disposal of PCBs.

Copies of the report, entitled Polychlorinated Biphenyls, are available @ $7.50 from Office of Publications, National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20418.

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