PCB-Articles

In a Variety of Places

Evening Star — Sept. 5, 1972

NEW YORK — Three years after the Food and Drug Administration's first finding that some foods were contaminated with a class of toxic industrial chemical known as PCBs, quantities of the persistent substance are still being found in food on grocery shelves.

Of some 3,500 samples of fish, cheese, milk and eggs tested in the last 18 months, one out of five contained measurable levels of PCBs an F.D.A. administrator reported during last week's annual meeting of the American Chemical Society here.

The report was one of 23 on various aspects of the PCB problem delivered during the week-long meeting. In general, the reports indicated that PCBs were one of the most dangerous (hundreds of times more toxic than DDT, for example) and most widespread of synthetic chemicals.

Half the Population

One government researcher reported evidence suggesting that half the human population may already carry quantities of PCBs in its flesh.

There were also reports that steps have been taken to reduce the risk of additional quantities "escaping" from industrial applications and entering the ecosystem, possibly causing birth defects and liver damage.

Dr. Albert C. Kolbye Jr., deputy director of the FDA's Bureau of Foods, said in a speech at the meeting that despite the widespread presence of PCBs in the environment, the chemicals were not considered at this time a threat to human health.

"I think the problem is under control," he said. "We have a very large margin of safety for PCB as long as we avoid undue, accidental exposures."

Long Term Unknown

Nonetheless, he noted, "We do not know how long-term exposure to PCBs might affect human health."

Among the reports were these:

- Scientists from the Canadian Wildlife Service have found quantities of PCBs in polar bears, seals and Artic fish. The researchers said the nearest site of industrial usage of PCBs was thousands of miles south of where the animals live.
- Analysis of water and bottom sediment samples by the U.S. Geological Survey has detected varying levels of PCBs in the waters of New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas and California. Tests in other states are expected in 1973.
- Michigan State University researchers found the reason for an almost complete cessation of reproduction in mink ranches in the Great Lakes region was the presence of PCBs in the coho salmon fed to the mink. A level of 5 parts per million in the diet caused complete reproductive failure.

PCB, which stands for polychlorinated biphenyl, is one of the most widely used industrial chemicals. Various types are used as plasticizers, adhesives, sealants and printing inks. They are also used in capacitors, in transformers such as the cylindical type seen on utility poles, and as heat-exchange fluids in many industrial operations.

The sole maker in the United States is Monsanto, which uses the trade name Aroclor.

It is generally believed that PCBs find their way into the environment as the result of burning discarded plastics and other materials in which they are used, and through leakage from machinery in liquid.

... one big pool to be used where they're needed most. Testing of this concept began July 1 in four areas.

The Pentagon believes these steps will permit the services to get by with 11,300 doctors instead of 14,500.

More Than 20 Hurt as Amtrak Train Derails

INLAND, Neb. (UPI)—The The last 10 cars of Amtrak's sleek California-Denver Zphyr, making its final daily run, jumped the tracks near this Nebraska prairie community yesterday, causing injuries to more than 20 of its 224 passengers.

Cars were toppled on their sides and some passengers had to be evacuated on stretchers, but only two were hospitalized. The rear cars jackknifed while the train was going at about 75 miles per hour. Three locomatives, three coaches and a dormitory car were not damaged, and continued on to Denver.

The accident occurred about 4:30 a.m. CDT, and most of the passengers were asleep.

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