Official U.S. Concern Over Chemical PCB

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 23—Officials of seven federal agencies are expressing increasing concern over the possible health hazards of a colorless, odorless liquid called PCB that some scientists hold to be more injurious than DDT.

In recent months, large amounts of PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, have been found in chickens, eggs, turkeys, salmon and fish meal.

This led to the formation two weeks ago by the President's Office of Science and Technology and his Council on Environmental Quality of a task force to investigate the presence of PCB in food and other compounds.

Monsanto Co. of St. Louis, which is the only American manufacturer of PCB, has been conducting a two-year study of the effects of the chemical on rats and dogs. A company spokesman said that no ill effects had been detected.

Since mid-August, at least three scientific meetings, including a session of Nobel laureates in Gotenberg, Sweden, have discussed PCB. The scientists concluded that PCB "concentrations may reach levels sufficient to damage ecosystems irreversibly on a worldwide scale unless the damage is recognized."

"Thus entry into the marine environment should be curtailed to every practical extent, even if this requires constrictions in their production and use," the Gotenberg statement said.

William D. Ruckelshaus, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, stated in an interview yesterday that "it is the sudden accumulation of information about PCB that gives us concern because it is used so widely in the environment."

The environmental agency is part of the PCB task force, which included representatives of the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture and the Interior, and the Food and Drug Administration.

Charles C. Edwards, FDA commissioner, said in an interview yesterday that the task force had been convened at his agency's request "because we realized that PCB was a hell of a lot bigger problem than the the FDA alone."

James D. Grant, FDA deputy commissioner, said, "We want PCB out of the food supply but we don't yet regard it as an imminent hazard to health."

Large amounts of PCB are used as insulating fluids and as a means of transferring heat from one mechanism to another, such as in electrical transformers, because of its ability to stand up under heat.

PCB, which has the consistency of molasses, can withstand temperatures of up to 1600 degrees Fahrenheit. It is used also in mimeograph copying paper, paints and pesticides.

The chemical has been in use for 40 years and like DDT it persists in the environment for years. DDT and PCB are so alike chemically that until several years ago it was almost impossible to detect one from the other by microchemical analysis.

Because of this, much of the environmental contamination by DDT is believed to have been caused by a combination of DDT and PCB.

To date, there has been only one episode linking PCB to health hazards to humans. Three years ago in Japan five persons died and about 1000 were afflicted with a severe skin disease named chloracne because a rice cooking oil had been contaminated by PCB.

Grant said that chlorinated dibenzofuran, achenomical akin to the herbicide 2, 4, 5-T, had been found in samples of PCB manufactured outside the United States, but not within.

The Monsanto spokesman said that the company was taking steps to ensure that products containing PCB were not sold to food manufacturing and processing companies. He refused to divulge the amount of the chemical being made.

The DDT advisory committee report that was given to Ruckelshaus two weeks ago noted that "it appears that the most serious chronic PCB contamination is in fish and fish-eating birds. Apparently PCBs are widely distributed among carnivorous birds which are the terminal carnivores of a complex mesh of food chains in the sea . . . Most of the acute residues of PCBs found to date can be attributed usually to inadvertent or accidental industrial causes."

In recent months as many as 80,000 chickens, 50,000 turkeys and tens of thousands of eggs have been destroyed because of PCB contamination of feed for fowl.

Major Staff Changes Likely In Police Dept.

Extensive personnel changes in the St. Louis Police Department, ranging from sergeants to majors, were forecast today by department executives. Eighty transfers were expected to be announced tonight at a ceremony for 34 recently promoted officers.

The transfers will include policemen in the bureaus of inspection, investigation and field operations. New commanders will be named for the Hampton, Carondelet, Peacock and Lucas Avenues Districts, it was indicated.

A new assistant chief of detectives will succeed Capt. Joseph Kuda, who will receive another assignment. The new assistant to Chief of Detectives John Doherty will be a major.

Recently promoted officers involved in the action are Capts. John Walsh and Gay M. Carraway and Lts. L. J. King, M. L. Beach, Paul Harmon and George Hyder.

Capt. John Berner was expected to be named commander of the new field inspection unit. Berner is the commander of the communications section.

The new unit is intended to improve discipline and law enforcement skills through district inspections. Four lieutenants, all serving in uniform, will assist the new commander of the field inspection unit.

Field inspections were discontinued several years ago because they lowered morale in the ranks. Patrolmen charged they were being spied on.

The revived unit will observe procedures at the scenes of crimes and will point out errors. Its stated purpose is to improve operations and to raise procedures to department standards

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floor to permit installation of wiring and similar utilities, substantial changes in air-conditioning systems, positive ventilation of elevator shafts and fire stairwells, and use of some method to permit firemen to open windows to ventilate smoke-filled areas.

"Smoke, with or without high temperatures, is one of the major problems of a fire, especially in a high-rise building," Degenkolb said. "Theoretically the fire-resistant floors provide a horizontal barrier to the spread of fire or smoke.

"Actually, this is not the case," he said. "Holes drilled through for wiring or other conduits permit ready passage of smoke from one floor to another. Frequently floors do not extend completely to outside walls. Smoke passes through.

"In some cases the space is filled with material that itself is flammable and may generate toxic smoke. Large quantities of wiring and other flammable substances frequently are installed in the space above a suspended ceiling.

"Most modern air-conditioning systems automatically shut off when smoke is detected in ducts, thus preventing the ventilation of smoke-filled areas. In any event, they do not add enough fresh air because of cooling and heating considerations. With windows sealed, as is the case in most new high-rise buildings, there is no way to ventilate except to break glass.

"When this is done on upper floors, the large, jagged pieces of broken glass are extremely dangerous to those working on the ground. Use of a tempered glass was tried in San Francisco but for some reason the glass did not break into small fragments as it was supposed to do," he said.

"What probably is needed is some method of releasing windows from a central point by emergency personnel so that they can be opened or removed manually."

Degenkolb assured his audience that he was not merely expounding theoretical dangers. He told of a fire that killed nine persons last January in a nursing home in Kentucky. The modern building was of fire-resistant concrete and masonry construction, but smoke spread through just such openings as he had described, he said.

Degenkolb is a retired battalion chief of the Los Angeles department.

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