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Durham Science Meet Studies PCB Effects

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Scientists from throughout the world are gathered in Durham to discuss the effects on humans of PCB, a DDT-like industrial chemical that has leaked into food supplies.

A Japanese researcher who has studied human beings after they ate food containing the chemical, said it caused stillbirths, birth defects, growth retardation in young boys and other health problems.

Dr. Atsuko Yamaguchi of the Department of Public Health at Kyushu University said the chemical caused an epidemic of "peculiar skin disease which was later called yusho in 1968. He said it was traced to rice oil produced and shipped on a certain day The oil was believed to have been contaminated with PCB when a heating pipe leaked.

"Many patients with yusho are still tortured by the disease even after more than three years," he told the conference at Quail Roost, a conference center north of Durham. "To cure them and to prevent another epidemic, all possible worldwide cooperative efforts are highly desired."

PCB, a liquid, has extreme heat resistance and is used where fire protection is a primary consideration in manufacturing, such as in heat pipes and transformers. It has been in use since about 1930.

The chemical gained public notice last summer when about 90,600 broilers were feared to have been contaminated at a North Wilkesboro plant and were destroyed. Later, about 720,000 eggs in Durham were destroyed because officials feared they were contaminated with PCB.

In addition to Japan, countries represented at the conference include the United States, Sweden and Canada.

Yamaguchi said yoshu symptoms included acne-type eruptions, discoloration of the skin and nails, perspiring, feelings of weakness and numbness.

He said that of 13 pregnant women exposed to the rice oil

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Japanese Researcher Cites Data

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10 delivered live births and two stillborn infants were delivered. The other was born dead for other reasons.

"These infants and fetuses had grayish dark brown stained skin, nails, and gingiva, and an increased eye-discharge at birth. As they grew older, their stained skin gradually faded. The majority of the babies were small for their periods of gestation," he reported.

Dr. Yamaguchi said affected school children were compared with unaffected children. Gains in height and weight of affected boys showed a decline after the poisoning, he said. The affected girls, however, showed no definite change in growth trends.

Dr. Yamaguchi said, "Many patients with yusho are still tortured by the disease even after more than three years. To cure them and to prevent another epidemic, all possible worldwide cooperative efforts are highly desired."

The discovery of PCB-contamination of its products by the U.S. paper industry is being researched. Dr. Paul Trout, director of Environmental Control for the Container Corp. of America, told the conferees that the primary source of PCB was carbonless carbon paper.

He said once the industry learned of the problem it took "immediate steps to eliminate" the source from "all grades of paperboard used in the packaging of food."

The FDA reported in October that thin, gray cardboard boxes containing cereals, babyfood, crackers, snacks, mixes, noodles and other popular supermarket items contained traces of the potentially toxic chemical.

Trout said, however, studies by the industry indicate that "PCB levels in currently manufactured paper and paperboard food packaging materials do not represent a hazard to public health."

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