PCB Pollution Found Worse Than DDT in Atlantic Study

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Scientists have discovered concentrations of man-made DDT and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in a host of plant and animal specimens collected in the course of cruises throughout the Atlantic Ocean.

This was reported today by the National Science Foundation in a release on the U.S. program for the international decade of ocean exploration.

It has long been known that the pesticide DDT has made its way into marine organisms as remote from civilization as Antarctica. During the recent cruises, conducted by vessels of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, DDT was found "in most specimens" collected.

The surprising discovery was that PCBs were present "in practically all specimens" and usually in higher concentrations than DDT.

More Through Atmosphere

According to Dr. George D. Grice of the Science Foundation, who participated in the research cruises, both DDT and PCBs apparently find their way into the oceans by way of the atmosphere.

About all scientists can say now about the levels of contamination discovered in marine plants and animals is that they appear to be "of physiological significance."

PCBs are industrial chemicals used as an insulator in electrical capacitors, in transformer oil, and as a heating medium and plasticizer. They also are found in hydraulic fluids, lubricating oils, and in some kinds of copying paper.

Recently, they were found in poultry fed with fish meal from a plant where they had leaked into the meal as the result of an accident in a heat exchange system.

Both Are Manmade

Neither DDT nor PCBs occur in nature; they are strictly manmade. So their discovery in a large variety of ocean creatures throughout the Atlantic gives a clue to how widely man's pollutants may spread.

The Science Foundation said plants and animals sampled included sargassum weed, zooplankton, flying fish, triggerfish, dolphin-fish, sharks, and tiny fish that daily migrate from the surface to as deep as 3,000 feet.

The international decade of ocean exploration is a multination program designed to get as much information as possible on the seas and their food and mineral resources as well as their effect on weather and climate.

Research like that of the Woods Hole cruises will help to establish "baseline data" for keeping track of marine pollution.

Dr. Thomas B. Owen, assistant Science Foundation director for the international study, has noted that the products and refuse of man's technological activities "are becoming a danger to the ocean and to the rest of the environment."

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