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PCB Contamination Spreads

WASHINGTON — With apologies to composer Woody Guthrie, here's a new line for one of the country's best-known folk songs: "From the redwood forests to the Gulf Stream waters, this land is soaked with PCB."

PCBs are polychlorinated biphenyls, a family of toxic, highly persistent industrial chemicals that have caused liver damage and birth defects in laboratory animals.

The redwood forests span the southern coast of Oregon, where a commercial bakery recently discovered that it had purchased — and now must destroy — 10,000 PCB-contaminated eggs.

THE GULF STREAM waters wash the west coast of Florida, where a chemist recently found a marked decline in the potential fertility of young men that appeared to be related in part to PCB traces found in the subjects' sperm.

This month's reports of PCB contamination aren't limited to these two states. In Franklin, Idaho, a poultry company is in the process of destroying



Martha Angle

Robert Walters

more than 300,000 contaminated chickens and more than 1 million poisoned eggs.

In Clinton, Iowa, a packing company is destroying the meat from 20,000 more chickens, all purchased from the Idaho firm. In Richmond, Utah, PCB traces have been found in 72000 frozen cakes that also must be destroyed.

MEANWHILE, THE company that was the sole U.S. producer and marketer of PCBs for almost half a century is busily propagandizing the public about the real and imagined glories of industrial chemicals.

The Monsanto Co. of St. Louis finally halted its production of PCBs (sold under the Aroclor trade name) in the autumn of 1977 — but not until it had produced enough of the toxic liquid to float an entire navy.

Monsanto has claimed in recent years that it always was concerned about the dangers posed by PCBs.

BUT WHEN THE threat of PCBs was first disclosed in the early 1970s, Monsanto denigrated these revelations as mere "political charges and sensational headlines . . . scare tactics and sensational reporting."

The company now has mounted an ambitious and expensive advertising campaign designed to demonstrate that chemicals are valuable, if not indispensable, to modern life.

Monsanto's ubiquitous television commercials extol the virtues of chemicals ranging from preservatives to firefighting compounds. Never mentioned, however, is the product that will haunt the nation for many decades to come — PCBs.

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