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Hazardous chemicals

The editorial on "River dredging and PCBs" and subsequent articles in the Tribune should be of special interest, and serve as a forewarning, since widespread use of questionable chemicals and their possible hazardous effects are growing concerns in our country today.

Must the burden of proof always lie with an unsuspecting citizenry to become possible victims of market-produced chemicals? Have we so soon forgotten the tragic Thalidomide incident, and DDT and its disastrous effects?

It was indicated in the editorial that PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are built up and maintained in the environment. Unfortunately this is true of other chemicals: the herbicide 2, 4, 5-T, for example, which cannot be made without the contaminant dioxin (the most poisonous chemical known to man; one drop can kill 1,200 people) and has been proven in testing to cause birth defects in laboratory animals in concentrations so low as to not be measurable. As a defoliant, 2, 4, 5-T tends to destroy specific habitat on which many species depend for survival. And yet forestry services use it to spray "undesirable trees" for removal, highway departments spray along roadsides to control brush and it is sold over the counter for weed killers for farm and home use in Minnesota.

The public should be informed, and only then can it object vehemently to being human guinea pigs or allowing commercial profits to take priority over the safety of any life. — Mrs. Richard Kent, Minneapolis.

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