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Reports on PCB

Researcher Here Refutes Officials

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Bureau of Commercial Fisheries researchers at Gulf Breeze have submitted a report to the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration on a potentially dangerous compound called polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB), found in Escambia Bay.

Dr. Thomas Duke, director of the laboratory, specializing in pesticide research, refuted inferences by state officials last week that PCB may be worse than hard pesticides.

In his report, submitted last week to become part of the record of the Escambia Bay Conference on Interstate Pollution held here by the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration in January, Dr. Duke reported PCB was first detected in Escambia Bay in April 1969.

Called Aroclor 1254, the compound is principally manufactured by a division of Monsanto Co., state officials revealed this week.

In Escambia Bay, according to Dr. Duke, "We traced one source . . . to the outfall of Monsanto Chemical Co. . . . after analyzing 30 water samples from Escambia River and Bay . . ."

According to Dr. Duke, local Monsanto officials were notified of the presence of the chemical in the discharge. Aroclor 1254 had been used in heat exchange process at the plant here, according to reports.

Much like the chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides, PCB is a persistent compound that does not readily break down and is known to be toxic to marine life.

In his report to the FWPCA, Dr. Duke gave exposure and concentration levels demonstrated to be fatal to shrimp and blue crabs.

Dr. Duke said present analyses indicate the release of PCB has been halted, but the substance continues to leach out of the bottom sediments of Escambia Bay.

State officials last week told a Florida House subcommittee on hard pesticides that DDT may not be as bad as PCB and that it may be getting the blame for ecological damage unjustly.

Bill Woods, fisheries chief for the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, said high levels of PCB was found in fish samples taken in some of last year's Escambia Bay fish kills.

Jay Carver, chemist for the Florida Department of Air and Water Pollution Control said, "I think the way it's going, a lot of the blame that DDT is getting is going to show up to belong to the PCB's," Carver said.

A report of the hearing implied that the "real culprit" is PCB rather than hard pesticides, but Dr. Duke emphatically refuted the idea.

"We have found that it took five parts per billion of Aroclor 1254 20 days to kill test shrimp," Dr. Duke said. "It took the same level of DDT only 24 hours to kill the shrimp.

"We did not find that PCB killed test fish at five parts per billion, but the same concentration of DDT killed half of the test population in less than 24 hours."

Dr. Duke and his staff first ran into PCB while examining bay life for pesticides. Samples of fish were provided by Dr. Tom Hopkins of the University of West Florida, Lt. Lewis Zangas of the Marine Patrol and Biologist Joe Blanchard of the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission.

"This was an example of government and industry working together to solve a problem," Dr. Duke said. "Once notified of the leakage, Monsanto stopped the release of PCB's almost immediately."

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