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Contamination from PCB becomes serious

Contamination due to polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), described as a new form of pollutant, is spreading gradually, and there are strong fears that its effects may be handed down to posterity unless suitable measures are taken.

This was revealed in an interim report announced by the Science & Technology Agency recently on special researches being conducted by it on prevention of PCB contamination.

The study is being undertaken with the cooperation of the Ministry of Health & Welfare, Ministry of Labor, Fishery Agency and various universities in the country.

In order to prevent further contamination through PCB, the agency called for the early recovery of the chemical and development of technology for its disposal.

The interim report said that a survey conducted on 70 fishes and shellfishes showed that waters entirely around Japan were being contaminated with PCB.

Contamination of waters in the Osaka Bay, Ise Bay and Lake Biwa has been found to be especially serious.

The degree of contamination in these waters was said to be more than 10 times as bad as those off the coast of New Zealand and the North Pacific.

PCB also was detected from carp caught in Kasumigaura in Ibaraki Prefecture, which up to now had been thought to be free from sources of contamination from PCB.

PCB also was detected from more than 90 per cent of the 204 milk and meat products made in Japan which were checked.

The ratio was much higher than PCB found in 40 per cent of similar imported products.

However, the degree of contamination of milk used by infants and sick persons as well as powdered milk for infants was found to be comparatively low.

No PCB was detected from 64 samples of water collected from rivers, lakes and underground water in the country.

Studies conducted on chronic toxicity of PCB by the National Institute of Health showed that most of the mice and goldfish which were administered more than 1,000 parts per million (PPM) of PCB died in the tests.

It was found that PCB with a high content of chlorine was more liable to accumulate in the body.

It was found also that if more than 100 PPM of PCB were given to pregnant mice, it was liable to have an effect on their offspring and other descendants in such forms as enlargement of the liver and deformation.

Fears thus were felt on possible adverse effects to offspring of human beings once PCB becomes accumulated in the parents' bodies.

The result of another survey conducted by the Industrial Health Institute of the Ministry of Labor on some 90 workers handling PCB showed that they suffered from abnormal liver functions and skin diseases.

Between 9.2 to 0.4 PPM of PCB also was detected from samples of their blood.

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