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PCB

JIM McGIFFORD: Ecologists won their fight to ban a toxic chemical called PCB from certain disposable products. Where those products stand now as related by WINS Science Spelalist Roger Field:

ROGER FIELD: The basic controversy over PCB seems to have quieted down lately. Environmentalists were able to demonstrate rather conclusively that even small amounts of Poly-chlorinated-biphenol(?) is pretty persistant and pretty harmful stuff. It's released into the environment when exposable products containing it are disposed. And the company that makes PCB-- Monsanto-- has agreed to stop selling the chemical for use in such products. And to find out whether the voluntary ban is being observed, I went to chemists who formulate products that had been fingered as having used PCB.

A chemist who formulates one shot carbon paper, for example, tells me that these days it's made with high micro-crystal and waxes and the PCB is left out. The resulting carbon paper is just as good and slightly cheaper he says. Now, a chemist who formulates plastics says that PCB has been used as a plasticizer non-evaporating solvent in the plastic that keeps it soft and flexible. But non-toxic plasticizers like dibutyl-phllaclate are used instead and the resulting plastics are just as good and just as cheap. Printing inks have long been decided as harbingers of PCB, but a chemist in that industry tells me the chemical was never used in inks. And scientists have found PCB in newspapers; even those made with virgin pulp. And until now they've always suspected the ink. But the latest analysis still shows it in the newspapers and it is in the pulp which comes from relatively remote forests and not in the ink. The PCB problem may be far more serious then anybody thought, in spite of what appears to be a successful ban on its use in disposable products.

This is Roger Field.

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