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# Nader Urges Toxin 'Alert'

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Ralph Nader urged the government yesterday to declare an immediate "official public health alert" about the "dire hazard" of PCBs, the highly toxic chemicals disclosed on Friday to have contaminated 75,000 eggs seized by the Food and Drug Administration.

An FDA spokesman, however, disparaged the suggestion. He said the current PCB problem is the result of a one-time industrial accident. He also said it is a problem of "food adulteration," not "a significant public health hazard."

Nader appealed for the "alert" in letters to Agriculture Secretary Clifford M. Hardin and FDA Commissioner Charles C. Edwards. Spokesmen said the officials had not received the letters.

The consumer advocate also accused the Agriculture Department of a "shocking abdication of responsibility" in administering a "voluntary" recall that Armour & Co. instituted in July after nine persons who ate its Genoa Salami products were made ill by non-fatal staphylococcus toxins.

On Thursday, Nader said, the New Jersey Department of Health found the products on the shelves of 17 retailers in 12 municipalities. Citing "reliable sources," he also said that the Agriculture Department failed to inform "at least some" health officials how to implement the recall.

A reporter read the full text of the Hardin letter over the phone to Clayton Yeutter, who, as administrator of Agriculture's Consumer and Marketing Service (CMS), is immediately affected by the charges.

He said he would not comment because the letter was addressed to the Secretary, but remarked, "There are plenty of good answers to everything."

### Other Charges

Other charges made by Nader and such responses as were immediately available:

• Yeutter, in a conversation with an aide to Rep. William F. Ryan (D-N.Y.), said at 2:30 p.m. Friday that he knew nothing about any PCB contamination of eggs. Yet, Nader cites "constantly apprised" Hardin's staff over the past three weeks of the danger to egg products.

• An "incredibly gross failure of communication between FDA and CMS" apparently exists. The FDA spokesman said his agency, which is responsible for shell eggs, has maintained close touch with CMS, which is responsible for products such as mayonnaise made from eggs that have been broken.

• The department began testing broken-egg products for PCB only "two or three days ago"—and is taking an "absurdly inadequate" number of samples.

• The "widespread contamination of shell eggs implies the need for the destruction of the hens" that laid them, but the department has done nothing about this, ignoring "the persistent raising of this issue in recent weeks."

• The department's emergency program to sample 400 chickens, turkeys and hogs a week for PCBs is of doubtful adequacy.

• The department is keeping the results of the program secret, and, in addition, has not explained how it may assure that frozen and processed chicken products are free of PCB.

• The FDA's program to sample shell eggs is inadequate, reaching at most 20,000 of the approximately 70 billion produced each year.

• The FDA did not disclose its "long-delayed findings" of PCB contamination of shell eggs "until obliged to do so by persistent outside questioning."

The FDA spokesman said the agency "welcomes public criticism," "but if our critics, including Mr. Nader, are to be either credible or constructive, they must apply to their own actions the same high standards of reason and responsibility that they require of FDA."

PCBs, which contain polychlorinated biphenyls, are chemically similar to DDT. Nader aide Peter H. Schuck, testifying on Aug. 4 before a House Commerce subcommittee, said that scientific research on PCB is "very incomplete."

But, he said, available evidence indicates them to be "a significant public health hazard." He cited a report that 10,000 Japanese, in 1968, had stillbirths, miscarriages, skin disease and liver damage after ingesting high doses of PCBs from cooking oil extracted from treated rice hulls.

The FDA spokesman, however, said, "The concern with PCBs is with heavy exposure over a long period of time. The egg problem doesn't fit that situation in any sense."

The FDA tolerance for PCBs is 5 parts per million. In 86 lots of eggs the agency tested, 20 contained more than 5 ppm and as many as 13 ppm.

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