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10/23/79 FYI: C. F. Callis
R. C. Isham
J. Ortiz
F. A. Provorny
J. C. Weber
D. Wood

FROM: Glynn Young

Vegetarian couple awaits word on their contamination from PCB

LAFAYETTE, Colo. (AP) — A vegetarian couple, who moved to a farm near here five years ago seeking a cleaner environment, won't know until Tuesday or Wednesday whether they have been seriously contaminated with the dangerous chemical PCB.

"We'll find out Tuesday or Wednesday," Wayne Darling, 32, said Sunday. "We don't know what to do 'till then except wait. The Boulder County health department couldn't tell us how much the concentrations were. They said they found traces of it (polychlorinated biphenyl) in the breast milk from my wife and the chickens."

Darling and his wife, Marie, 29, had been told they would get an answer Sunday on the levels of PCB found in their chickens and Mrs. Darling's breast milk.

Darling said Sunday that health authorities told him "quantitative measurements" still were not available from the tests.

"I would say we're in limbo. My wife is very worried. The worse thing is we're trying to live a clean life. My wife quit smoking before the baby Matthew, 1, was born and she breastfeeds him ... he's our biggest concern," Darling said.

Source of the PCB is 17 barrels of the chemical that had been stored for years against the barn on the farm they rent in the rolling plains between Denver and Boulder at the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

Darling said he knew the barrels contained PCB but only last week, watching a Public Broadcasting System program, did he discover the chemical was dangerous.

When he wrote Monsanto Agricultural Products two or three years ago, "Monsanto said it was banned by the feds but didn't tell me it was hazardous to our health," Darling said.

Health authorities erected a chain-link fence around the oil drums after discovering some were leaking and plan to move the chemical soon to Idaho for permanent disposal.

Robert W. Harding of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said "really significant" amounts of PCB were found around the barrels and that the oil should be removed.

The EPA banned PCB earlier this year. State health officials say PCB's effects can be cumulative and not immediately apparent. PCB was used for insulating electrical transformers and other apparatus where extreme heat is present.

Darling said the leakage around the barrels is not apparent to the eye because "the grass and the sunflowers grow up around them like every place else."

Before the fence went up, he said his cows and chickens grazed and fed around the barrels often.

Although professed vegetarians, Darling said his family eats the eggs and they do drink the cows' milk.

"I'm also concerned because there are places all over the country like ours where there may be these old barrels and people don't know what's in the barrels ... and Monsanto doesn't seem to be liable for the stuff," Darling said.

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1970 USU Studies Focused on PCB

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LOGAN (UPI) — PCB was isolated in brown pelicans, bald eagle eggs and cow's milk in the early 1970s and Utah State University researchers found evidence at the time that one mixture of the chemical produced abnormalities in insects.

The researchers — Nabli Youssef, William A. Brindley, and Joseph C. Street — said that polychlorinated biphenyl fed to house fly larvae caused changes in the testes of the insects. PCBs were recently found in eggs in Montana, Utah and Idaho and chicken farmers voluntarily destroyed hundreds of thousands of chickens to prevent contamination of humans.

The chemical is used as a coolant in electrical equipment such as generators. Long-term exposure can cause liver problems and lesions in humans.

The USU researchers said their studies showed that some trout fed the flies which were contaminated with the mixture — Araclor 1254 — developed minute physiological changes.

The larvae of the flies were injected with the mixture while others were impregnated with acetone for control purposes.

Day-old male flies were immobilized and dissected. Examination with a microscope showed that the spermatids nuclei of the flies treated with the PCB failed to divide.

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