MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.
(m) 236,000 (s) 665,000

JUN 17 1975

CLIPPED BY BACONS

1800

A warning about PCBs

Polychlorinated biphenyls—or PCBs for short—are a group of chemical compounds used in many industrial processes as a hydraulic fluid, heat-transfer fluid or electrical insulator. PCBs also are used in the manufacture of some hand soaps. Research has shown that PCBs can cause birth defects or prevent reproduction in birds, fish and mammals, and may be cancer-causing. The leading PCB researcher, Dr. James Allen of the University of Wisconsin, fears that PCBs might have similar effects on humans.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has set a federal safety limit for human consumption of PCBs at five parts per million, and yet little was done until recently about restricting the interstate shipping and sale of food found to contain more than the federal limit. In 1971, for example, the FDA found 40 parts per million in carp being shipped from Minnesota's Lake Pepin. The FDA, however, did not move to stop the interstate shipping and sale of Lake Pepin carp until last month, claiming that until a court ruling in February it had not been clear that the agency had jurisdiction over chemicals such as PCBs which are not intentionally added to food.

Now an interstate committee, representing Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and the U.S. government, has urged the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to limit PCBs to "essential uses." The committee chairman, Donald Mount, chief of the National Water Quality Control Laboratory at Duluth, says that PCB levels in Lake Michigan trout range up to 40 parts per million or more, and "there are no signs it's getting any better." PCBs also have been found in fish taken from Lake Superior.

Pinpointing the source of PCB pollution has been a problem. "There apparently aren't any major individual sources that can be identified and eliminated," Mount says. "Just a lot of little sources." That is why, he says, the interstate committee has recommended that PCBs be restricted to essential uses.

The industries using PCBs say that non-toxic substitutes would be hard to find. But if PCBs are as dangerous as they now appear to be, their use should be severely restricted. We hope the federal EPA accepts the interstate committee's recommendation. "The really alarming thing about PCBs," warns researcher Allen, "is that they may not affect us today or tomorrow. It may be 10 or 20 years before we really see effects on humans." It would be wise to act now.

MONS 030981