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Hearing told of woes blamed on PCBs

By NED STEELE

The toxic class of chemicals known as PCB's was blamed yesterday for possible cancer links, dangers to eaters of Hudson River fish, possible hazards to Long Island's future water supply, contamination of poultry and worker injuries in a factory.

The criticisms of polychlorinated biphenyls came at a public hearing held by state Atty. Gen. Louis Lefkowitz, who is considering recommendation of laws to curb and possibly ban the use of PCB's.

An executive of Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co., chief manufacturer of PCB's, said his company has already sharply restricted its sales of the chemicals and has been unable to develop a perfect substitute. He urged further studies of its possible harmful effects.

PCB's are liquid chemicals now used primarily for insulation in high voltage electrical equipment. Recent reports of excessive PCB traces in Hudson River fish and findings by some scientists that the substances can cause cancer triggered Lefkowitz' probe.

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NEAR THE END of the hearing Lefkowitz' deputy Phillip Weinberg said the Attorney General would probably recommend some form of PCB curbs to the next session of the legislature. Scientists, environmentalists and government officials disagreed during the session on whether to temporarily halt restrict, ban outright or merely study further the use of PCB's.

Biochemist A. Karim Ahmed of the Natural Resources Defense Council, urged "a rapid phaseout of all PCB use," calling the chemical "very tenacious" because it can move up the food chain and does not easily break down in the environment. Dr. Joseph Highland of the Environmental Defense Fund agreed, saying the substance tends to accumulate in body tissues.

While federal safety limits have set five parts of PCB per million as the tolerance level for human consumption, Dr. Highland said that concentrations two parts per trillion will cause tumors in one out of one million humans.

Half of the United States population already have concentrations of one to three parts per million in their body tissues, he added.

One of the strongest blasts at PCB came from a Mt. Kisco industrialist who said his firm quickly dropped its use in building electrical transformers when one worker was hospitalized after exposure and others developed rashes.

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