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PCB POLLUTION IN JAPAN.

1. The Japanese Government have just published the final report of a special study project on PCB pollution in Japan. The report, the result of six months' work by researchers from nine ministries and agencies, shows that very much higher concentrations of PCB exist in certain areas than had been anticipated before the survey.

2. Tests were conducted in 1,084 localities and in 20 of these concentrations were found to be considerably above the limit of 0.01 ppm set by the Environment Agency. Of these 20 places 13 were around transformer and capacitor manufacturing plants or waste paper reprocessing factories, all of whom use PCB in their process. In three cases, levels of above 10,000 ppm were found in mud samples from the waste discharge outlets of the plants, with in one case (the Kyowa Electric Co. of Kannami, Shizuoka Prefecture - a capacitor manufacturing plant) a massive 82,600 ppm. The effects on both soil and water in the vicinities were marked, with resulting concentrations of up to 1.33 ppm in rice and up to 43 ppm for inshore fish.

3. To combat this pollution the Government announced its intention to ban the use of PCB in capacitors, transformers and heat-exchangers by the end of 1973. This is likely to affect some 3,000 plants in Japan, who up until now have been allowed to use PCB in transformers and heat-exchangers provided they were sealed. Instead Japan will revert to the use of old-fashioned transformer oils.

4. PCB pollution will continue to be produced by waste paper processing plants. However the government have announced plans to conduct tests on fish and shellfish in the affected areas and any specimens with concentrations of over 0.5 ppm of PCB for deep sea fish and 3 ppm for inshore fish will be banned from sale. In addition a medical survey of some 4,000 people, mostly fishermen and their families, is planned for January and February 1973, to check for any PCB induced diseases.

5. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) plan to withdraw some 30,000 tons of existing liquid PCB. At present incineration is considered the best method of disposal in Japan,

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but the two current suitable incinerators only have a combined capacity of 720 tons per year. Even with the construction of additional plant, MITI do not reckon that disposal will be completed before 1986. With disposal by incineration in mind the Environment Agency have introduced a new standard for the level of PCB contained in the gas produced by the incineration of PCB containing products. This should have a maximum value of 0.01 ppm with an average value of below 0.007 ppm.

6. Of interest has been the considerable coverage given to the report both by the press and the television media. For the first time in cases connected with PCB, the reports have named both the companies concerned and the exact levels found.

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