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Toxic Chemical Found in River

A routine surveillance network on the Great Miami river has detected the presence in the river of a hazardous chemical compound, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), with characteristics similar to DDT and other "hard pesticides."

Bernard Sacks, sanitary engineer for the federal Environmental Protection agency's technical programs office in Cincinnati, said it appeared the pollutant had been detected early and he did not think "there is any health problem from this."

SACKS said the agency began an investigation of the chemical when the quarterly results of samples taken from the five-station network last spring to check on pesticides "showed up out of the normal spectrum."

His office suspected PCBs and in December collected several special samples, he said, which bore out the suspicions. The state Water Pollution Control board and Miami Conservancy district were informed.

The chemical was traced to the National Cash Register Co., the Kimberly-Clark Co. Moraine mill, the two Frigidaire plants in Dayton and Dayton's sewage treatment plant.

EDWARD ARMSTRONG, an engineer in the state health department's industrial wastes section, said both NCR and Frigidaire have eliminated virtually all use of PCB compounds after they were informed.

The source at NCR was an emulsion coating used in making the company's carbonless paper, while Frigidaire engineers found the source in two plants to be a coolant. Kimberly-Clark has checked all of its chemicals and can find none containing PCB, Armstrong said.

The source of the PCB iin the city's sewage system is wastes from the industries, which use the sanitary sewers.

"WE THINK the PCB in the Dayton sewage treatment plant will be eliminated shortly," Sacks said.

The compound does not decompose in water, nor readily oxidize in the atmosphere, so that it accumulates in soil, fleshy, fatty tissues and the organs of animals, fish and birds. It is poisonous after it has accumulated to a certain level.

Sacks said his staff "will go back and do some additional sampling in June" in the river. He said no sampling has been done as yet of the river sediment and no significant sampling has been made of aquatic life.

EPA'S analytical quality control laboratory reported that analyses of a number of fish showed concentrations of more than 150 parts per million of PCB.

Sacks said the U.S. Food and Drug administration has set a PCB tolerance level of five parts per million on fish.

He said that a couple of fish were analyzed, but that it was impossible to relate the concentrations found in the river and those in fish flesh.

No agency which decides on what is safe for human consumption has been brought in yet.

State health department officials said there had been no tests for PCBs in any other streams in the state.

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