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Did you ever try to catch a PCB?

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Maybe the best way to catch a polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) is to stick out your hand and snare one going by.

The PCBs are everywhere — including floating around in the air.

So are a lot of other toxic chemical compounds and metal such as mercury and lead.

AND THEY aren't getting loose in the ecosystem just from manufacturing processes like those in Dayton that have been polluting the Great Miami River with PCBs.

The incinerators have seen to that.

PCBs, which behave and poison much like their cousins, the chlorinated pesticides, are finding incinerators ideal escape vehicles.

All it takes, say chemists and ecologists researching the matter, is lighting a match to any product containing the PCBs.

The PCBs won't burn. But they will vaporize, and the vapors will be carried into the upper atmosphere where they collect on particulate matter then fall back into the rivers, lakes and oceans—and various food chains.

IT IS one of the more thorough means of distributing the stuff over, on and throughout the entire global environment.

And once PCBs are in the environment they can be hazardous to the health of birds, fishes, animals and humans.

They are chlorinated aromatic hydrocarbons like DDT.

And like DDT, they are slow to decompose and quick to accumulate in tissue and become more toxic as they accumulate.

They can interfere with the reproduction cycles of birds, retard growth in certain species of fish and cause liver and skin lesions in humans. They can kill when their concentrations become high enough.

IN THE DAYTON area there are about 200 PCB distribution centers, including Montgomery County's giant twin incinerators.

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There also are plenty of products containing PCBs and other toxic substances which burning will liberate. Plastics, carbonless reproducing paper, spent ballasts from fluorescent light fixtures, objects coated with plasticized paints and sealants and some brands of specialized lubricants are examples.

Charles Bennett, county incinerator superintendent, figured yesterday that of the 900 tons of trash going up in smoke daily, 10 percent is what is traditionally called garbage and a sizable portion of the other 90 percent is packaging materials like vinyl chloride polymer films which often contain PCBs.

AND WILLIAM M. Auberle, county air pollution controller, said the other 200 or so commercial incinerators licensed in the county undoubtedly are burning some products that contain the PCBs, even though most of them are designed to burn at least 80 percent paper.

The implications should be obvious.

But it's not all bad, according to Auberle.

The particulate scrubbers that remove fly ash and other pollutants from the twin incinerators also grab off gases, including some of the PCB vapors, before they can go up the flue, he said.

And since the water used in the scrubbing process is in a closed system and continually recycled, the stuff is not being dumped into the river via some drain pipe or drainage ditch, he said.

Instead, the PCBs settle out with solids onto a conveyor belt in the bottom of the water system holding tanks and eventually are buried in a land fill beside the South Incinerator in Moraine, he explained.

HE SAID the ranchm is too deep for rain runoff to wash anything into the streams, thus the only way the PCBs might be getting into some part of the environment is by rain water leaching into the earth.

"Whether that could be a problem depends on how much

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leaching you're getting into the water system, he said.

Bennett said leaching tests have been made by a private consultant and "there isn't anything detrimental." He also noted that the Miami Conservancy District is putting its stamp of approval on the landfill, "so I don't think they found anything dangerous to the water table."

Still, the Conservancy District is planning tests on scrubbing waters that will be poured periodically into two nearly installed cooling lagoons at the North Incinerator to find out what kind of toxic substances are being entrained in the waters and what their concentrations are.

AND AUBELLE said he is certain that not all toxic substances, including PCBs, are being caught by the scrubbing waters.

"There is a certain percentage in those white plumes of water vapor you see coming out of the incinerator smoke stacks," he said.

So, even though the question of how much PCB, chloride gas, mercury, lead, zinc and such pollution the incinerators produce has been "a lower priority problem," the point is being reached when it can't be any longer, Auberle concluded.

"We'll be wanting to know exactly what those plumes do contain," he said.

"The PCB will be one substance of many and many of which may be toxic. For the emission codes that appear to be eminent—hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, photo chemical oxidants—we think we have no problems. But when we get around to codes for these other materials, we will certainly have to go back and evaluate because all these contents these materials . . .

"And we really don't know what extent is getting out."

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