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CHEMICAL THREAT HELD WIDESPREAD

No Area Safe From PCB's, Scientists Say—Northeast One of Two 'Hot Spots'

By RICHARD SEVERO
Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO Nov. 29—North-eastern United States and Ontario appear to be "hot spots" for concentrations of potentially harmful polychlorinated biphenyls in pools, wildlife and fish, but scientists presenting research papers here today made it clear that no geographical area can be considered safe from this group of chemicals.

Dr. Frederick W. Kutz of the United States Environmental Protection Agency's national human monitoring program said that perhaps 41 to 46 percent of all Americans had the chemicals, known as PCBs, in their tissues. Several hundred Americans have been tested. He said the chlorinated hydrocarbon chemical had also been found in human milk.

Polychlorinated biphenyls are used in the manufacture of capacitors, transformers and other industrial products in many countries. They are similar to DDT in chemical construction and they are not readily biodegradable.

People who have worked with PCB's have complained of allergic dermatitis, nausea, dizziness, eye and nasal irritations, fatigue and asthmatic bronchitis. In experiments with laboratory animals, PCB's have caused liver cancer and reproductive failures.

The chemicals are being discussed here in a three-day conference sponsored by E.P.A.

Findings Over Wide Area

Charles R. Walker, senior environmental scientist with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, said that PCB's had been found in fish and wildlife in widely scattered areas of the United States including the Allegheny, Ohio, Hudson, Mississippi, Missouri, Kanawha, Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers in Central and Eastern portions; the Columbia and [illegible] in the far west and Alaska; and in the Rio Grande, Alabama and Mississippi Rivers in the Gulf state region.

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[illegible] said that all

[illegible] tested contained PCB's, as did a great number of black ducks and mallards tested in the Atlantic Flyway. In ducks and mallards, the most highest concentration of PCB's was found in the Mississippi Flyway.

The picture was also disturbing in Canada, Dr. Donald Grant of the Department of Health and Welfare, Turtle and Food Evaluation Division, said that of 172 persons checked in Ontario, 30 percent had levels of PCB's of more than one part per million in their tissues. PCB's were also in human milk, Dr. Grant said the PCB levels in women were higher in mothers in females.

The Canadians have grave concerning about concentrations of PCB's in eels in the St. Lawrence River that they are seriously considering banning commercial eel fishing [illegible] Dr. Graham said that [illegible] Canada set the allowable levels of PCB's in the edible flesh of fish at two parts per million. Eels checked in the St. Lawrence had an average level of 17.14 parts per million, smelts were 1.18 parts per million and sturgeon from the St. Lawrence averaged 2.72 parts per million. It could not readily be determined what effect this would have on Canadian fisheries.

In the United States, five parts per million remains the allowable limit in fish but Dr. Charles E. Jeffelt, director of the Division of Chemical Toxicology, Bureau of Foods, Food and Drug Administration, pointed to indication in his remarks that similar action was being contemplated in the United States.

In New York's Hudson River and in Lake Ontario, striped bass and salmon have been found with levels well in excess of five parts per million. Eels caught in the Hudson had levels more than twice that of their Canadian counterparts and Gordon R. Reid, New York State's Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, has recently warned against eating fish from the Hudson.

When informed that Canada had adopted more conservative PCB guidelines, Mr. Reid commented the move and said he felt that the United States should follow Canada's example. Dr. Graham of Canada's Fisheries and Marine Service, also commented.

Mr. Graham noted that last, Monday Canada set the allowable levels of PCB's in the edible flesh of fish at two parts per million. Eels checked in the St. Lawrence had an average level of 17.14 parts per million, smelts were 1.18 parts per million and sturgeon from the St. Lawrence averaged 2.72 parts per million. It could not readily be determined what effect this would have on Canadian fisheries.

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The executive director of the National Fisheries Institute, Lee Wedig, came to the conference today and called for an immediate ban on "further sale, production, importation or recycling of polychlorinated biphenyls."

Mr. Wedig said that "conservation circuit is made for commercial fishermen whose livelihood is destroyed by prohibition of sale of the species of fish in which presence of PCB's exceeds" Federal guidelines.

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