ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Mon., May 9, 1983

Almost All In U.S. Found To Have PCBs In Bodies

By William Prokopal
Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — An Environmental Protection Agency study made public today has concluded that almost all Americans now had PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — in their bodies, but that the average concentration of the chemical had dropped.

William D. Ruckelshaus, the EPA's acting assistant administrator for pesticides and toxic substances, said he was gratified by the results showing that decline in the contamination levels. He called it a "measurable example of the improvements that environmental regulations are bringing us."

The manufacture of PCBs has been banned since 1971.

Clay said at a news conference that it was significant that only 1 percent of those sampled in 1981 had more than 3 parts per million of PCBs in their fatty tissue, as against 8 percent who had levels that high in 1977.

He said he thought that the decline reflected a decrease in the amount of PCBs in the environment.

But the study also showed that the percentage of people with a detectable amount of PCB in their body had risen to 99 percent in 1981, up from 69 percent in 1972.

The study found that 99 percent

See EPA, Page 7

EPA

From page one

of women sampled had a detectable level of PCBs in their milk. Thirty percent of them had what was described as "positive" ratings, which means that they have levels above 50 parts per million.

The study also showed that the North Central region of the country, seven states that includes Missouri and Illinois, had the highest percentage of people with "high" PCB levels — meaning PCB levels above 3 parts per million.

Three percent of the population in this region registered "high" levels, making it the only region in the country that had more than 1 percent of the population in this category.

Frederick Kutz, one of those who worked on the study, said the North Central states — especially the Great Lakes states — were one of the nation's PCB hot spots.

Clay said the researchers had chosen the 3-parts-per-million level because that is the level at which PCBs can be easily measured. It does not coincide with any increased health risk, he said.

But Clay added that it was known that the higher the level of PCBs the greater the health hazard.

PCB is a toxic and persistent chemical that is still used in electrical transformers and capacitors. Tests on laboratory animals have shown that it causes reproductive failures and tumors.

Clay estimated that 300 million pounds of the substances were still in use in electrical equipment.

The 1981 figures on which the EPA conclusion was based came from tests conducted on 97 people nationwide. Most of the tests were tested on cadavers.

This sample of 97 people contrasts with the approximately 700 to 1,100 people sampled in earlier years that the study was conducted. And there was no sampling done at all in 1979.

But Kutz maintained that the 1981 figures still were statistically significant

MONS 019350