PCB Scare Is Blamed On Alarmist Reporting

By Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration has blamed alarmists and unbalanced reporting for what he calls unjustified public alarm over discovery of industrial chemicals called PCBs in food.

"Public confusion has created public alarm and a feeling of still another crisis in the food supply," Dr. Charles C. Edwards told a news conference Wednesday. "I know the confusion is unnecessary, and I believe the alarm is greater than the facts will justify."

Edwards did not name the alarmists or cite the unbalanced reporting he said caused the confusion.

Monsanto Co. of St. Louis, the sole producer of PCB, has ceased selling it for anything except closed systems, where it is used primarily as a coolant.

Monsanto earlier supported "the federal government's task force approach to the PCB environmental issue" and pledged support of that approach.

"At the same time, we believe our 3-year-old program to control the uses and escape of PCB is correct and that it will supplement the (federal) agencies' efforts," the company said.

The FDA announced Monday it had discovered PCBs, which have been connected to human skin and liver ailments and birth defects in animals, in several packaged foods. So far this year, PCBs have lead to the destruction or detention of chickens, eggs, turkeys and fish.