PCB-Arthells

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PCBs Can Harm Humans, CSU Researcher Declares

PCBs — chlorinated hydrocarbons similar to DDT — can be harmful to humans since they produce an enzyme in the liver which represses hormone (i.e. reproductive) activity, said Dr. Richard Johnson, a CSU entomologist who discovered PCBs in the Fort Collins sewage sludge.

No similar tests have been run at the Greeley treatment plant, but state health engineer Ron Schuyler, who serves Weld and Larimer Counties, said, "You can find just about anything you want in sludge in some quantity." He said the significance of Johnson's discovery would be in the concentration of PCBs.

Varying Level

Johnsen said the concentration he and research associate Kenneth Collyard found varied from one to 12 parts per million. This is not a dangerous level, he said, especially since PCBs, like DDT are fat soluble, thus inactive as long as they are stored in body fat. He also said the effect of PCBs on hormones lasts only as long as the substance is being metabolized and used by liver enzymes.

"I don't want people to get overly alarmed at this discovery," he said, adding that Monsanto, one of the chemical companies that makes PCB-containing products, has said it would cease distribution of products for which they could not control disposal. PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — have been used in carbonless carbon paper, motor oil, paint, plastics and other products, primarily as a means of viscosity control.

Johnsen said his report was most significant in that it indicated PCBs were being leaked into the environment. He pegged industries around Fort Collins as the most probable source in the sewage sludge.

No Surprise

Bill Dunn, head chemist of the State Health Department, said Johnsen's finding did not really surprise him.

"His finding also shows that the PCBs are being taken out of the environment with sewage processing. It's not going back into the streams and food chains . . . that's good," said Dunn.

Larry Mounce, administrator of the Community Pesticide Research Center in Greeley, noted that pesticides have been readily suspected to be in the natural environment since they have been sprayed on crops. However, he said, PCBs — used primarily in industry were not thought to be widespread in the environment. Thus, for some time PCBs were erroneously identified as pesticides.

Mounce said PCBs were just recently discovered to be dispersed in nature; therefore, they are a new subject and much of the evidence against them is rather feeble.

Nonetheless, he said, the research center — one of three of its kind in the U. S. — has been finding residues of 100 to 600 parts per million PCBs in human tissue samples. He said the compound, with a chemical arrangement similar to pesticides, has also been found in some endangered species such as the Brown Pelican.

Johnsen said he has not yet tested the Fort Collins sewage plant effluent to see if all the PCBs are removed, but that

From the desk of
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FYI -- These few clippings from this week's batch may be of interest.

EVJ

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