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Dangerous Chemicals Widespread in Environment

CHICAGO, Ill.—A potentially harmful family of chemicals is more widely distributed in the environment than was previously thought. The chemicals are called PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls). In laboratory experiments, PCB's have been found to cause cancer and reproductive failures in animals.

About 10 million pounds (4,545,454 kg) of the poisonous chemicals may enter the environment each year through vaporization, leaks, and discharges from factories, says the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). PCB's are used in manufacturing transformers and other electrical equipment.

The chemical structure of PCB's is similar to DDT. Like DDT, PCB's do not decay easily in the environment.

EPA claims that ten manufacturing plants are dumping PCB's directly into waterways. Fish from the Hudson River contain such high amounts of PCB's that consumers have been warned not to eat the fish. Ordinary water purification methods do not remove the toxic chemicals from the water.

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