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CLIPPED BY BACONS

1860 IN SOMETHING OF A MAJOR DEPARTURE FOR A WASHINGTON BUREAUCRAT, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Russell Train, admitted last week that his agency hadn't been acting letter perfect. He told the Fisheries Subcommittee of the House Merchant Marine Committee: "With hindsight, EPA probably should have moved more aggressively to attack PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) discharges into the aquatic environment during the past several years." It's recently been shown (see the companion Nautilus publication, Coastal Zone Management, 22Dec, 26Nov, 3Sep75), that PCB levels "greatly exceeding Food & Drug Administration guidelines of 5 parts per million (ppm)" have been found in fish taken from the Great Lakes, the upper Mississippi River, off the Southern California coast, in streams entering the Gulf of Mexico, in the Hudson River, and in other waterways of New York State. The worst cases have been Lake Michigan (up to 165 ppm) and the Hudson River (up to 350 ppm).

Train argued that his agency didn't have the legislation it needed to deal with PCBs and similar problems, and asked for toxic substances control legislation. Such legislation was introduced into Congress over five years ago, but has never been acted on.

EPA's Gulf Breeze (FL) Environmental Research Laboratory detected a PCB whose source was a nearby Monsanto Chemical plant, in the water, sediment, and biota of Escambia Bay in 1969. Since then, the lab has concluded, among other things, that (a) the greatest concentrations are in the sediments and biota; (b) PCBs can be accumulated by estuarine and marine crustaceans directly from contaminated sediments; and (c) two beds (reefs) of oysters located eight miles from the source show detectable PCBs in their tissues. PCBs are acutely toxic at parts per billion levels to some estuarine organisms (penaeid shrimp, grass shrimp, pinfish), reduce shell growth in oysters, and kill many juvenile fishes. Adult fish may be unaffected by exposure, but the survival of their eggs is cut. //

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