

State Must Curb PCB Threat

THE LATEST entry on the danger list of alphabetical poisons is the widely used and insidious group of industrial chemicals known as PCBs. They rapidly are becoming a threat to human and environmental health exceeding even that posed by the now-outlawed DDT.

PCBs are far more resistant than DDT to degradation by natural forces, and have accumulated in the environment to a greater degree than that pesticide. Further, PCBs have been in popular use since 1929, a decade longer than DDT.

And because man has not shown the same alarm over this industrial pollutant, it literally has infested the world. "It's all over the place—we find PCBs everywhere we look," the toxic substances director of the Environmental Protection Agency said recently.

Yet, strangely, PCBs continue to flourish unregulated by law, despite every evidence the danger they present is real and near. Though the Monsanto Co., the sole U.S. manufacturer, has sliced production in half voluntarily, the effect on the pollution rate has been negligible. Forty million pounds still are sold annually to some 40 PCB outlets.

The ubiquitous chemicals are used in electrical transformers and capacitors, and in such diverse products as various lubricants, waterproofing chemicals and "carbonless" duplicating paper.

The awful effect of the PCB buildup has been particularly felt in Michigan. The federal Food and Drug Administration set maximum safety levels for human consumption of fish at five parts per million—levels that current research suggest may be too high.

But recent samplings from Lake Michigan show the decimated bloater chub with an average of 3.6 parts per million, the coho salmon with 10.5 parts per million, and large lake trout with 22.9 parts per million. Since 1972

the state has warned consumers not to eat more than one salmon meal a week.

And the PCB contamination doesn't stop with fish. Gulls have been declining at an abnormal rate around Saginaw Bay and Grand Traverse Bay recently, with one dead herring gull from the latter site showing an astounding 2,600 parts per million of Aroclor 1254 (a PCB) in its liver and brain.

PCBs have turned up in Wisconsin snowfalls. They've been monitored in polar bear flesh. Mink fed Great Lakes fish containing PCBs have failed to reproduce, and PCB pollution has been blamed for forcing some mink growers out of business.

And, finally, there are grim indications that PCBs could cause cancer in man, just as they have caused liver cancer in laboratory rats. It is known that more than 1,000 Japanese suffered a disfiguring skin disease that later was traced to rice oil that had been contaminated by PCBs.

The case for severely restricting the use of PCBs is clear. While this theoretically could be achieved by passage of the federal Toxic Substances Control Act, the PCB threat is too great to leave its control to a proposed law that consistently has been shoved to the congressional back burner.

It's clear that if Michigan is to get relief from the PCB peril, state action is required. Rep. David Bonior's HB 5619 would ban the manufacture, sale or use of items containing PCBs in quantities of more than one part per million after Jan. 1, 1978. The sole exception would be PCBs employed in a closed system as a dielectric fluid for electrical transformers and capacitors.

Disposal of liquid or solid wastes resulting from PCB use would be tightly restricted after the first of next year. This is critical, since there currently are no laws or guidelines impeding the discharge of PCBs from factories.

Mr. Bonior's House Marine Affairs Committee is holding hearings on the bill now. Reason dictates it should be enacted as quickly as possible.

10-28-75
In the Wrong Place

LAST JUNE, when the Democrats in Congress needed every vote they could get to override President Ford's veto of a strong strip-mining bill, Rep. John Conyers staved