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# In this township, PCB spells danger

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Just mention PCBs in Logan Township and nearly any resident will launch into a tirade about the evils of what used to be one of science's wonder chemicals.

They are afraid, deathly afraid of the man-made organic compounds whose full name is polychlorinated biphenyls. A statement in a recent Environmental Protection Agency news release tells why.

"PCBs have caused birth defects and cancer in laboratory animals, and they are a suspected cause of cancer and adverse skin and liver effects in humans," the release said.

Nearly every scientist agrees they are dangerous. They are no longer manufactured in the United States, and the electrical industry is phasing out their use.

The problem is how to get rid of the millions of tons of PCBs still in use - those that have not already contaminated the environment.

A government-acclaimed chemical-waste disposal company in Logan Township, Rollins Environmental Services, has asked permission to incinerate PCBs.

That request has brought a militant protest from this rural community, where many people still do not know what "PCB" stands for. They know only that the chems als could damage their environment and perhaps, they fear, kill them and their children.

During the past decade scientists have found that PCBs, when released as waste or through products into the environment, persist in the environment forever. They are similar to the banned pesticide DDT.

They make their way into human bodies through vegetables raised on contaminated soil, through animals that eat grass or grain contaminated through the soil, through fish taken from contaminated waterways, through contaminated drinking water and through the air.

Scientists do not agree on what level of PCB contamination, if any, in the human body is safe, but the compounds are found in substantial concentrations in milk, fish, eggs and in mothers' breast milk. Some experts have estimated that 40 per-

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# In this township, PCB is an immediate danger

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cent of the population has accumulated some PCBs.

Because of the public outcry, permission for Rollins to burn PCBs has been delayed while federal and state environmental officials review the request. Rollins would test burn the chemicals briefly to prove the effectiveness of their incinerator, but the company's proposal complies with EPA disposal regulations.

The manufacture of PCBs in the United States was stopped voluntarily by the sole U.S. producer, Monsanto Co., in 1977, and EPA regulations issued in April have banned their manufacture and phased out most uses.

However, although the potential dangers of PCBs were known more than a decade ago, the EPA has restricted disposal of the chemicals by separate regulations only since February 1978.

The agency estimates that 150 million pounds of PCBs are dispersed throughout the environment and another 290 million pounds are located in landfills. There are some 750 million pounds of PCBs still in use, most of which will be allowed to remain in certain electrical equipment for perhaps 30 years.

The people of Logan Township have made no secret that they distrust the EPA, the state Department of Environmental Protection and Rollins.

An explosion at the facility in December 1977 that killed six workers brought a public demand to close Rollins, but the DEP and EPA have allowed it to re-open. The agencies also have told the township it has no control over the plant's operation or over what it may discharge into the air or Raccoon Creek.

Immediately after the explosion, officials from both agencies feared that a quantity of PCB s that Rollins was to dispose of had been only partially burned in the blast and may have contaminated the surrounding land.

Tests showed some PCBs in surrounding fields and wells, but officials labeled the levels "acceptable." They told residents that PCBs could be harmful only to workers who were exposed to large quantities over long periods.

Monsanto, a worldwide company that manufactures everything from Astroturf to specialty industrial chemicals, began manufacturing PCBs in 1929 to meet a need in the electrical industry for an insulating fluid for high-voltage transformers and capacitors.

PCBs are highly fire-resistant and inert, which means they will never break down into natural atoms or molecules. They actually are a group of similar compounds that were widely used in lubricants, waterproofing coatings, carbonless copy paper, printing inks and special adhesives.

Monsanto has a plant in Logan Township, but PCBs were never manufactured there, company officials said Wednesday.

A Swedish scientist first discovered PCB accumulations in fish in 1966 and ten years later, an industrial accident at a PCB manufacturing plant in Japan injured more than 1,000 people. PCBs were banned almost immediately in Japan.

When the presence of PCBs was first confirmed in the U.S. environment in 1970, Monsanto voluntarily cut production in half, limiting sales to the electrical power distribution industry, which held no good safety data on the compound - and in which the compounds had less chance to escape into the environment. As alternates were found, Monsanto ended production months before the EPA ban. PCBs still are being manufactured in Europe.

The most serious damage to the environment by PCBs seems to be in contaminating waterways and marine life, primarily near industrial areas. Sport and commercial fishing areas in the Great Lakes have shown increasing contamination, far above the Food and Drug Administration's acceptable levels for fish.

Fish in the upper Hudson River have been contaminated, apparently from discharges by General Electric plants in Illinois, wastes from a Westinghouse plant have been blamed for poisoning local streams and farmlands. PCBs have been found in fish and birds throughout the country and have even been detected in snow at the North Pole.

In a status report on PCBs prepared by Monsanto, the company says it, General Electric and other laboratories are trying to develop a practical means of removing PCBs from waterways.

Dredging is not effective or practical because it recirculates particles that have settled to the bottom. Scientists are trying to develop bacteria to break down PCBs and are exploring a method of using high-energy electrons to destroy PCBs in water.

However, for the PCBs that have not yet entered the environment, the EPA says they should be disposed of by dumping in a few approved landfills or incinerated at 1,200 degrees (1,200 Celsius) for at least two seconds, a process that destroys 99.9 percent of the compounds.

Rollins, to the dismay of residents in Logan Township, is one facility that probably can incinerate PCBs.

EPA and DEP officials seem likely to give their approval, but their apparent confidence is not likely to appease the fears of local residents. As they see it, the cards are stacked against living with PCBs.

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