FDA SAYS Tom Gossage

Chemical PCB FYI Will Be Curbed

WASHINGTON (U P I) — The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said Wednesday that the nation's only producer of the industrial chemical known as PCB had promised to stop selling the possibly hazardous compound to food and feed plants.

FDA Commissioner Charles C. Edwards also said that National Cash Register Co. has discontinued use of PCB in the manufacture of carbonless carbon paper, the primary source of PCB contaminants found in recycled paper food packaging.

In addition, J. C. LaGrua, vice president of Federal Paper Board Co., the nation's largest producer of recycled paper, said his firm and other recyclers were screening carbonless carbon paper out of their mills to avoid a recurrence of PCB contamination.

Edwards told a news conference that "alarmists seeking headlines' had blown the PCB problem out of proportion, creating unwarranted public alarm and a feeling of still another crisis in the food supply."

PCB's, short for ploychlorinated biphenyls, are chemicals made solely by Monsanto Chemical Co. and are widely used in machinery, primary in a heat transfer fluid in transformers. Edwards said Monsanto had advised FDA officials that it would limit PCB sales to "essential closed system uses, with no use in food or feed plants."

In laboratory rats, PCB's caused skin and liver ailments and birth defects.

Last July, PCB residues were found in thousands of chickens and eggs. The contamination was traced to leaky machinery at a North Carolina plant manufacturing fish meal later fed to the chickens.

Earlier this month, PCB residues were found in 50,000 turkeys processed at a Minnesota plant. The Agriculture Department said Wednesday that a three-state survey proved the contamination was an "isolated occurrence."

Of the overall threat from PCB Edwards said: "The alarm is greater than the facts will justify . . . PCB's are a potential but not immediate health hazard . . . We are taking specific, adequate and positive steps to deal wih whatever problems or potential problems that PCB's are likely to pose to human health."

The FDA disclosed earlier this week it found PCB contamination of food packaging materials made from recycled paper. At least two food products — shredded wheat cereal and noodles — picked up unacceptably high PCB levels from the package, the FDA said.

Edwards said National Cash Register reported it had stopped using PCBs in copy paper June 1. Edwards acknowledged, however, that the chemical might be passed on from reams of copy paper previously purchased by industry.

But in an interview, LaGrua said recyclers do not purchase office waste paper and hence could prevent processing of wastes containing high levels of PCBs.

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