Pollution Victims' Illnesses Detailed

WASHINGTON (AP) — John Snider, a teen-age athlete, suddenly developed a number of strange symptoms after the chemical PBB was accidentally introduced into the Michigan food supply, his mother told Congress Thursday.

"We found John on the floor of a bedroom. His arms were floating in the air and foam was coming from his mouth. He wasn't able to speak," recalled Loretta Snider of the 1976 incident.

That was the first manifestation of symptoms that still continue, she said.

Mrs. Snider was among witnesses at a House Science and Technology subcommittee hearing on pollution-related diseases.

Most of the witnesses testified that victims of such diseases generally are unable to get compensation because the legal system requires them to prove what caused their illnesses with the kind of detailed links that science is not yet able to provide.

Roy Dowdy of Danville, Va., said he hasn't been able to get compensation for byssinossis, or brown lung disease, that was diagnosed after he worked in textile mills for 41 years. "I filed for workers' compensation in 1978, but there is no money yet," he said.

He said all he gets is his Social Security check.

Paul Michaels, a Raleigh, N.C., lawyer who specializes in occupational disease cases, said Dowdy continued working for three years in one of the most hazardous parts of the plant after he was told he had brown lung disease.

The difficulty in obtaining compensation is that the exact cause of brown lung has not been determined by scientists, said Rep. Albert Gore, D-Tenn., the chairman of the subcommittee.

"It may be decades before the scientific cause is known and that will be too late for many workers," said Ted Kunstling, chairman of the North Carolina Textile Occupational Panel.

Mrs. Snider said she had never heard of PBB, or polybrominated biphenyls, until after her son was stricken. He had seizures, spent great amounts of time sleeping, lost all energy and had chest pains and other problems, she said.

She said her Cadillac, Mich., family "will never be the same and neither will thousands of other Michigan families."

Mrs. Snider said her son "still suffers skin rashes, convulsions, low blood sugar, tremors, is hyper-nervous, has loose bowels, numb fingers, speech difficulty, loss of energy, joint aches and is irritable. He also experiences severe headaches and is always hot."

In addition, his allergies are much worse and he suffers many sore throats and respiratory problems, Mrs. Snider said. She said a doctor told her that John was suffering from "PBB poisoning."

Gary Schenk, a Grand Rapids lawyer who has represented her, said no victims have won lawsuits alleging injury from PBB because the legal and scientific systems are inadequate to deal with such a major contamination.

PBB got into a substantial portion of Michigan's beef in 1973 when the chemical, a fire retardant, accidentally was mixed into cattle feed.

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