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No threat from PCB's

The Government, basing its judgment on current knowledge, sees no imminent threat to the safety of the food supply or to the public health from polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB). Dr. Charles C. Edwards, spokesman for FDA, believes that the confusion over the danger from PCB's is being compounded by alarmists and "unbalanced reporting."

According to Dr. Edwards, the Government and industry have been actively eliminating potential and actual PCB contamination of the food supply since 1966. In spite of these efforts there have been some isolated instances of food contamination.

On behalf of FDA, Dr. Edwards rejects the idea that crisis headlines and demands for national health alerts are either justified or needed to meet the present situation. He observes that science does not support such actions and that FDA will continue to abide by the dictates of science in making regulatory judgments on behalf of the consumer.

In summarizing its actions on the PCB problem, FDA applauds the cooperation of industry. Specifically, Monsanto, the primary domestic producer of PCB's, is now selling PCB's only for nonfood uses. National Cash Register Co. has also stopped using PCB's for its carbonless carbon paper. The paper has been withdrawn from the production of recycled packaging materials.

Except for isolated incidents involving fish, FDA says that almost all of the high levels of PCB's found to date have been associated with accidents which FDA is working to prevent. FDA has also stepped up its surveillance of the food supply to detect PCB's and has entered into a coordinated government effort under the direction of the Office of Science and Technology and the Council on Environmental Quality to deal with the problem.

Dr. Albert C. Kolbye, deputy director of FDA's Bureau of Foods, classifies PCB's as moderately toxic, and certainly much less toxic than DDT. He observes that animal and human data point to 150 to 300 micrograms per day as being in the safe range as far as temporary dietary intake is concerned. According to Dr. Kolbye, FDA is not aware of any foods contaminated on a regular or consistent basis.

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