Dallas Times Herald
D. 221,7[illegible] [illegible] 330,033

APR 13 1978

MONS 001073

Contaminated meal forces destruction of chickens

By ANDREW POLLACK
Staff Writer

Distribution of contaminated fish meal, largely in Texas, has forced the destruction of thousands of chickens and eggs and threatens many more, the federal Food and Drug Administration said Wednesday.

FDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have been conducting a nationwide sampling and search program to track down and recall the contaminated meal, which contains polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) — harmful chemicals widely used in electrical equipment — in levels exceeding federal health standards.

Most of the contaminated fish meal entered the United States at Port Arthur and is believed to have been distributed in animal feeds mainly in Texas and the Southwest, an FDA spokeswoman in Washington, D.C., said Wednesday.

At least one local firm, B & D Mills, Inc., of Grapevine, is known to have received some contaminated product and others might have received some, a regional FDA spokesman said.

The FDA spokeswoman, Nancy Glick, said 800,000 pounds of tuna meal manufactured by a Ralston Purina Co. subsidiary were contaminated in a warehouse fire when two transformers that used the chemicals as a coolant exploded, splattering fluid over the meal.

The fire occurred in Puerto Rico about a year ago, but FDA learned of the contamination only recently, Ms. Glick said.

"We don't know how many chickens or eggs were sold before it was discovered," she said. "We know several hundred thousand chickens containing excessive PCB levels have had to be destroyed, and eggs from contaminated laying hens are being destroyed daily."

> *"We don't know how many chickens or eggs were sold before it was discovered. We know several hundred thousand chickens containing excessive PCB levels have had to be destroyed, and eggs from contaminated laying hens are being destroyed daily."*
>
> — Nancy Glick, FDA spokeswoman

Dr. Fred Madden, assistant to the USDA regional administrator for meat and poultry inspection, said at least 112,000 chickens in Texas have been destroyed in the last month — 80,000 in one place and 32,000 in another. He declined to name the poultry dealers involved.

Madden said he is confident that stepped-up sampling begun in early March has prevented contaminated poultry, meat and dairy products from reaching the marketplace since then.

And FDA said the levels of PCBs found so far in animal feed, chickens and eggs have been barely above the acceptable levels and should not cause harm to humans because the standards have a built-in safety margin.

The highest level found in the meal has been 62 parts per million (ppm), far greater than the allowable level of 2 ppm. The permissible levels in human foods range from 0.2 ppm in infant foods to 5 ppm in fish and shellfish. "It's not a super-crisis in the sense that botulism would be, let's say," said Jerry Henderson, a spokesman for FDA's Southwest regional office in Dallas. "But it does represent a serious problem."

In high doses PCBs can cause acne-like skin eruptions, darkening of the skin and rash, excessive discharge from the eyes and swelling of the eyelids, Ms. Glick said. The chemicals also have been linked to liver cancer in laboratory animals.

Henderson said the bulk of the contaminated meal was shipped out of Puerto Rico in about 6,800, 100-lb. bags, about 5,000 of which went to Atlantic Shippers of Texas, Inc. in Port Arthur. Smaller amounts went to Fort Smith, Ark., and Arkeny, Iowa, he said.

"Out of that, it went everywhere," he said, explaining that the original tuna meal was mixed with other materials and fed to chickens, turkeys, swine and cattle. It is not known whether any of the contaminated meal has reached pet foods.

"I'm sure as we dig into it more and more we're going to uncover more and more places where they might have gone," Henderson said.

FDA was first alerted to the problem in early January, when a Texas poultry

See CONTAMINATED on Page 14

Contaminated meal forcing chicken kills

Continued from Page One

firm reported it had found excessive PCB contamination in chickens. It took until late March for FDA to determine the cause and scope of the problem, Henderson said.

PCBs remain in the environment for a long time and have become so widespread that the presence of small amounts in animal feeds is unavoidable, FDA said.

PCB contamination closed New York's Hudson River to fishing two years ago and cost the polluter, General Electric Co., $3 million to help clean the river.

Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co., the major manufacturer of the chemicals, halted production last year, but they are "still present in 70 to 90 per cent of transformers throughout the world," said Norman Dyer, chief of the Pesticides and Hazardous Materials Branch of Environmental Protection Agency's regional office in Dallas.

He said that new EPA regulations for the proper disposal of PCBs as they are phased out will take effect next week.

The current PCB incident is somewhat reminiscent of a 1973 Michigan case in which polybrominated biphenyls (PBBs), a related group of compounds used as a fire retardant, were inadvertently mixed with cattle feed, and eventually ingested by cattle and people in that state.