PCB- Articles

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Tests in District, 18 States Show PCB in Human Tissue

By BRIAN SULLIVAN

NEW YORK — Human tissue samples taken in 18 states and the District of Columbia have revealed the presence of industrial chemicals, according to a government survey reported today.

"These materials are widely found in the population," the report said. "Positive samples came from every hospital, city and state sampled."

The report came from the Division of Pesticide Community Studies of the Environmental Protection Agency and was presented to the annual meeting of the American Chemical Society. The division is in Chamblee, Ga.

The report did not discuss the question of possible harm to humans at the low levels detected. PCB toxicity considerations will be discussed later in the meeting.

In laboratory tests, PCBs reportedly have caused skin ailments and liver and birth defects in animals. PCBs are not pesticides but are a class of compounds similar to DDT, which has been almost totally banned in the country.

The initials PCB come from the chemical name polychlorinated biphenyl. They are highly resistant to heat and designed for use only in "closed systems" so they would not find their way into the environment.

The sole producer of the chemicals in this country is the Monsanto Chemical Co. A government official noted earlier this year that Monsanto has restricted the use of PCBs to closed systems, but scientists noted that the chemicals are also produced in other countries and the problem is a global one.

On a number of occasions, chickens, eggs, turkeys and fish have been found contaminated with unacceptable levels of PCBs.

In related PCB reports today:

● Dr. Hans Krnup Weber of the U.S. Geological Survey said a study done with the New York State Health Department found PCBs in 52 of 325 samples of treated and untreated water used for public drinking supplies in the state.

The levels of PCBs detected ranged from 0.1 to 4.9 micrograms per liter of water, he said, adding that the Environmental Protection Agency has said that lakes and rivers should contain no more than 0.01 micrograms.

● Dr. Gerald W. Bowes of the Canadian Wildlife Service said PCBs had been detected in Polar bears across a wide range of the Arctic and subartic and that this suggests widespread contamination of "this large and remote marine environment."

In the human tissue study, Dr. Anne R. Yobs said fatty tissue samples collected in 1968 and 1969 showed PCBs present in a significant portion of the general population.

Dr. Yobs said more detailed studies then showed that in 537 samples 196, or 21.1 percent, contained measureable amounts of PCBs of one part PCB per million or more parts tissue and 125 or 13.8 percent contained trace amounts or less than one part per million. The rest contained no PCBs.

At present 2,189 samples have been tested, with only slight changes in this distribution, Dr. Yobs said. The highest level found was 16 parts per million. Samples are collected through pathologists and are taken during surgery or autopsy. The 887 samples were collected from 46 pathologists in 38 cities.

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