10/8/79

FYI: J. Weber
[redacted]
J. Ortis
F. Provorny
D. Wood

FROM: G. Young

David Wood — Do you think we should get somebody in medical to contact the CDC about this B&L

PCB Montana

THE JOURNAL OF COMMERCE, Tuesday, October 2, 1979

PCB Contamination Indicated In Number of Western States

United Press International

ATLANTA — Despite a nationwide ban on the manufacture and distribution of the suspected cancer-causing chemical PCB, federal health experts warn that at least 10 western states may be massively exposed to PCB contamination.

The Atlanta-based national center for disease control, which is currently studying data from two surveys to determine the level of human exposure to PCBs caused by a leak in an electric transformer in a Billings, Mont., meat-packing plant, made the announcement in its weekly morbidity report.

Citing the health dangers of the chemical, CDC officials noted a federal law in 1976 ordered the manufacture and distribution of the chemical to cease within 2½ years and banned all non-enclosed use of PCBs.

"However, since much equipment containing enclosed PCBs is still in use, exposures such as the present one in Montana may still occur," the CDC said.

The chemical properties of PCBs make them useful as insulators and heat-exchange agents in capacitors and transformers.

They can enter the body by ingestion, inhalation or through the skin, where they tend to accumulate in the fatty acids and are poorly metabolized.

Laboratory tests have shown PCB causes cancer in test animals. In addition to its cancer-causing properties in animals, the CDC said human exposure studies involving serum PCB levels of 50 to 350 parts per billion have been associated with skin sores, hyper-pigmentation, elevated triglycerides in the blood and abnormal liver function.

Children born to mothers exposed at this level are of low birth weight, may be hyper-pigmented and may develop chloracne (skin sores) from PCBs in their mother's milk," the CDC said.

Meat meal produced by the billings plant became contaminated in mid-June, but went undiscovered for two months, in which time many shipments of the meal, used in chicken and hog feed, were made to several states.

With the discovery of the 200-gallon PCB leak and the tracing of the meal shipments, authorities conducted tests of farm products. Those tests resulted in the Agriculture Department finding that CPB contamination was known to have affected at least 10 states — Montana, Utah, Idaho, Washington, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming and Oregon.

The Agriculture Department and the Food and Drug Administration came under severe criticism for the delay in detecting and responding to the Billings incident