Raleigh Times

PCB Suspected of Causing Birth Defects, Retardation

DURHAM (AP) — A Japanese researcher told a worldwide gathering of scientists Monday that the industrial chemical PCB, used in food processing, is suspected of causing still births, birth defects and retardation of growth.

The researcher, Dr. Atsuko Yamaguchi, spoke to a convention of the National Institute of Environmental Health and Science.

PCB, polycholorinated biphenyl, was found earlier this year to have contaminated tons of fish meal processed at a Wilmington plant for use in feeding broilers, laying hens and hogs.

The toxic industrial chemical is a liquid that is highly resistant to heat. It is designed to be used in so-called closed systems, where it is not supposed to come into contact with food or feed. It has been used since 1930.

The contamination was found to be caused by a leak in a closed system at the Wilmington plant. The U.S. Department of Agriculture spent weeks trying to recall the meal from companies. There have been no reported cases of human beings becoming ill from this contamination.

Dr. Yamaguchi, a researcher for the Department of Public Health at Kyushu University, said there was an epidemic of a "peculiar skin disease which was later called Yusho", in 1968 in a Japanese town. He said the cause of the epidemic was traced to rice oil produced and shipped on a certain day.

The oil was believed to have been contaminated with PCB which leaked from a heating pipe used in processing the rice oil.

Of 13 pregnant women who used the rice oil, Yamaguchi said, 10 delivered live children, two delivered still-born infants, and the child of one was dead from other causes.

The 10 children born alive, he said, had "grayish, or dark brown stained skin and nails, and an increased eye discharge at birth. The majority of the babies were small for their periods of gestation."

Yamaguchi said, "Many patients with Yusho are still tortured by the disease even after more than three years."

Dr. Albert C. Kolbya, deputy director of the Food and Drug Administration's Bureau of Foods, said that in the United States "fish primarily from fresh water locations, appear to be the primary source of exposure (to PCB) through foods.

"Most states having significant problems with fish contaminated by PCB have taken appropriate steps to restrict dietary intake by issuing public warnings and imposing other requirements," Kolbya said.

Kolbya also said that PCB gets into food through paper containers that contain the chemical and which are not removed from old bakery products before they are processed for feed.

Scientists Confer On PCB's Effect

DURHAM (AP) — Scientists from four nations gathered in Durham Monday to discuss the effects of the chemical PCB — a toxic industrial chemical, on human beings.

Dr. Atsuko Yamaguchi of Japan, who has studied human beings who ate food contaminated by PCB, said the chemical caused still-births, birth defects, retardation of growth in young boys and other health problems.

Yamaguchi, a researcher for the Department of Public Health at Kyushu University, said there was an epidemic of "peculiar skin disease which was later called Yusho" in 1968 in a Japanese town. He said it was traced to rice oil produced and shipped on a certain day.

The oil was believed to have been contaminated with PCB which leaked from a heating pipe used in food processing.

PCB is a liquid with extremely high heat resistance. It is used in manufacturing when heat resistance is of primary importance such as in heating pipes and transformers. It has been used since 1930.

Yamaguchi said that of 13 pregnant women who ingested the rice oil, 10 delivered live birth, two delivered still-born infants and the child of one was dead from other causes.

The 10, he said, had "grayish, dark brown stained skin, nails and gingiva, and an increased eye discharge at birth.

"As they grew older, the children's stained skin gradually faded. The majority of the babies were small for their periods of gestation," he reported.

Yamaguchi said, "Many patients with Yusho are still tortured by the disease even after more than three years. To cure them and prevent another epidemic, all possible worldwide cooperative efforts are highly desired."

Researchers attending the conference are from Sweden, Canada, the United States and Japan.

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