FDA Will Set Limit on Toxin

Substance Is Similar to DDT

BY JOHN MACLEAN

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13—Before summer, the Food and Drug Administration will set a tolerance level for a new environmental threat called PCB, a substance similar to DDT in structure, it has been learned.

Dr. Charles C. Edwards, commissioner of the FDA, said in an interview that the level probably will be five parts per million (p.p.m.) in feed. This is two parts below the current level



Dr. Charles Edwards

of tolerance for DDT in beef cattle.

The proper name of PCB is polychlorinated biphenyl.

Used in Manufacturing

PCBs are widely used industrial compounds marketed in the United States under the trade name Aroclor. PCBs are often in the manufacture of paint, plastics and pesticides. PCB residue has been found in fish and wildlife tissues in this country and in Europe.

"This is a new and separate variation of the DDT story," said Richard Rank, head of the FDA guidelines section.

The FDA is conducting a study of PCBs to discover how toxic they are.

Not as Widespread

"PCBs are not as widespread as DDT, and they may not be as toxic," Rank said. In cases of acute poisoning they appear as toxic as DDT, he added.

"The unanswered question is whether they take a part in chromosome breaks and that is what we are trying to determine," Rank said.

These other developments in the PCB story are occurring right now:

1. The Department of Agriculture is testing poultry tissues for PCBs.

2. Scientists have found PCBs have been mistaken for DDT and are reviewing data on the presence of DDT.

3. Other studies are under way by the government and private industry into the toxic effects of PCBs.

The FDA action has been

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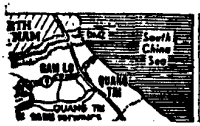

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(Reuters)—The Thailand

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prompted in part by the finding of high levels of PCBs in 130,000 chickens from the state of New York last month.

Prompts National Check

This find by the Department of Agriculture has prompted a nationwide check. So far, PCBs have not turned up in high-level quantities in other places.

In New York, the levels found in testing ranged from 0.6 p.p.m. to 30 p.p.m. The Agriculture Department immediately asked the FDA for a tolerance level. It was served 5 p.p.m. would be taken as a temporary action level.

"We definitely feel this was an isolated case and anything on the market is probably good," said Dr. Kenneth McEwen, deputy administrator of the Agriculture Department's meat and poultry inspection division.

The chickens involved in the New York case have been impounded by their purchaser, the Campbell Soup Co.

Could Occur in Storage

Government scientists hazarded a guess that the incident may have been caused by exposure of the chickens' feed to paint containing PCBs, which could occur in a storage bin.

In addition to wear and weathering of products containing PCBs, scientists say PCBs are spread through the environment by industrial wastes and by burning trash which contains PCBs as ingredients.

Both PCB and DDD appear at the same point in spectographs, the method used to determine the makeup of animal tissue. Until a year ago, it appears, DDT and PCB amounts were added together and given as amounts of DDT.

Mistaken for DDT

The first systematic work in U. S. to differentiate between DDT and PCB was done at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD., a laboratory of the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

A study published there last March showed how PCB had been mistaken for DDT in two bald eagle carcasses. Bald eagles found dead are sent to Patuxent for analysis.

The impetus for the Patuxent study was a report by European scientists in 1967 disclosing PCB in wildlife tissues.

A separate study of the effects of PCB on fish is under way by the Fish and Wildlife Service at the Fish-Pesticide Research Laboratory in Columbia, Mo.

37 Per Cent Die

One test showed that 37 per cent of a study group of catfish died within 16 days when kept in water with 10 micrograms per liter of a PCB formulation.

Swedish research workers have shown that as many as 114 different PCBs are possible.

The sole U. S. manufacturer, Monsanto Co., has agreed with the government in the future it will sell PCBs only for use in closed systems, such as electrical transformers.

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