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PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls)--Industrial chemicals similar to DDT--have been implicated in the deaths of more than 17,000 seabirds found on the shores of the Irish Sea in the fall of 1969. Some estimates put the total death toll at close to 100,000. Laboratory reports of a large-scale

investigation following the disaster were published this spring. The reports, according to the Marine Pollution Bulletin (May 1971), do not single out one pollutant or disease as the cause of the birds' deaths, but rather note that the birds were in a vulnerable moulting stage, somewhat undernourished, and had fairly high levels of lead, mercury, and other heavy metals in their bodies. However, none of these factors were likely to have caused widespread fatalities. Perhaps the most significant finding was that the birds' livers contained high levels of PCBs. The laboratory reports point out that the amounts of PCBs in the birds may have been sufficient additional stress to tip the balance between life and death.

Monsanto Chemical Company, sole manufacturer of PCBs both here and in Britain, has recently limited the sale of PCBs to those industries where use of PCBs can be controlled (such as in heat-transfer applications), in order to prevent their release to the environment.

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