To control export certificates, OIG said Guatemalan officials agreed not to issue export licenses unless a corresponding official meat product inspection certificate accompanied the product, and also pledged to keep an effective and constant control on the use and handling of the certificates by the assigned veterinarian.

●

PCB REPRODUCTIVE EFFECTS STUDY ON GE WORKERS PLANNED

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has initiated a study of the effects of polychlorinated biphenyls on reproductive outcome.

The NIOSH study, listed in the latest edition of Tox-Tips, a publication of the National Toxicology Program, was begun last fall with the initiation of a preliminary record search into the live births of women at a General Electric capacitor plant in New York, who took pregnancy leaves between 1958 and 1975, for evidence of low birthweight infants and neonatal deaths.

NIOSH plans to expand the preliminary evaluation into an interview of the cases and controls to gather information on potentially confounding factors such as tobacco, alcohol, and drug use; past medical history; and occupational history, and to gather information on other adverse reproductive outcomes including miscarriages, stillborns and congenital defects.

The December, 1980, edition of Tox-Tips also noted a study on the detection of neurotoxicity of environmental agents, based on demonstrating the earliest, subtle changes in the electrophysiological characteristics of excitable tissue, underway at George Washington University.

A summary of the project, which is scheduled to end in June, noted that results thus far show that these procedures can detect the onset of neurotoxicity at a time equal to or preceding that of any other methods employing behavioral or histopathological techniques with comparable dosing schedules.

A University of Rochester study on environmental toxicity, as expressed by visual dysfunction, is also listed in the Tox-Tips. The study is using oral doses of methylmercuric chloride, acrylamide monomer, or methanol, in monkeys.

●

EEC DELEGATION TO PRESENT USDA CASE ON INSPECTION PRACTICES TO MEMBER NATIONS

The European Economic Community delegation which visited Washington recently has agreed to present, to the EEC, the U. S. Department of Agriculture's argument that the EEC directive on meat inspection should emphasize quality of the end product rather than specific inspection requirements.

This would be achieved if the EEC inserted an "equivalency" clause in the current directive.

OIG conducted an audit of the country's system after USDA halted shipments from the country last year because product from an uncertified plant was found in the box of a certified one (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Aug. 18, Page 34).

According to the September 1980 OIG audit, meat export certificates were printed and controlled by Guatemalan plant management, ante mortem inspections were not always being performed as required, and, in some instances, plant management controlled the official stamps used for branding, rather than the inspector.

In addition, OIG said in the report, "there did not appear to be prohibitions on shipments of product between certified and non-certified plants. This, we believe, is especially important with respect to plants producing for export, and the absence of prohibitions on such movements increases the chances for product from non-certified plants to enter the U.S."

Two Guatemalan meat plants were re-listed by USDA in October, and the agency said at the time this was because they were found in an investigation not to have been involved in the misrepresentation of meat products (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Oct. 6, Page 35).

Attached to the FSQS memo was a report by an agency foreign programs office reporting on newly-established export certificate controls imposed by Guatemala, which he called "satisfactory."

The FSQS foreign programs officer also reported that Guatemalan inspection officials were maintaining the necessary controls over brands at the two plants he had reviewed.

However, FSQS said Guatemala has not implemented a policy of rotating veterinarians, recommended by OIG, saying that although one may be established involving plants in a particular location, "it does not seem likely at this time that a rotation policy involving the relocation of plant veterinarians will be established."

OIG also called for a review of the Guatemalan export meat inspection program, "including effectiveness and integrity, by an independent third party," but FSQS said the Guatemalan government had not identified an independent government unit for auditing the meat inspection program.

The memo from the FSQS foreign programs officer also reported that the two establishments he had reviewed were meeting biological residue requirements.

The OIG report said the Guatemalan inspection program had not communicated violative residue test results to owners of animals, even though this is required under a control program for biological residues.

OIG recommended that control over brands be established by assigning veterinarian responsibility to secure brands when not in use rather than permitting plant management to secure brands "as is now done in some plants." OIG also called for uniformity of brands by use of one brand per plant rather than use of multiple brands.