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Another chemical hazard

The contamination of the natural environment with PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) is the latest in a long series of public health hazards resulting from the dissemination of chemicals without adequate testing for the human consequences.

Now the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has begun a crash effort to remove PCBs from the nation's waterways. The effort will be costly to both industry and individual taxpayers.

Because of their fire-resistant properties, PCBs are widely used in heavy electrical equipment. They are also used in the manufacture of paints, plastics and some other products. PCBs have been shown to produce a number of human ailments, from lesions of the skin to miscarriages. They also are suspected of being carcinogenic, meaning they might cause cancer in animals and possibly in humans.

The EPA has found PCB levels exceeding the limit of five parts per million set by the Food and Drug Administration in fish taken in New York state, the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River and off the southern California coast. The chemicals also have been found in milk and eggs.

Russell Train, the EPA's administrator, has said many times that Congress should pass a Toxic Substances Act which would require careful evaluation of chemicals *before* they are released wholesale into the environment. Public safety and common sense cry out for such a procedure.

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