STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Division of Health Services

P. O. Box 2091 Raleigh 27602

TO: North Carolina Citizens Living on Roads Where PCBs Were Dumped

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON PCBs

There has been much concern recently about the criminal dumping of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) along North Carolina's roads. The purpose of this memorandum is to present the facts about this situation from a health standpoint.

WHAT ARE PCBs? : PCBs are a group or class of chemicals which have been used widely in industry since the early 1940's. These oily liquids have served as agents in electrical equipment and in many other industrial situations. They do not tend to break down very easily over time. Unfortunately, they have found their way into the environment down through the years so that fish, wildlife, domestic animals and many humans now carry very small amounts of PCBs in thier bodies.

To complicate matters, PCBs are usually mixed with other chemicals before being used in industry. During use, there is some breakdown of these chemicals (including the PCBs) similar to the changes that occur in motor oil in an automobile with use.

WHAT ARE THEIR EFFECTS ON HUMANS? : There is no immediate threat to the health of anyone living in the area of these PCB spills. In the few situations where humans have been poisoned by these chemicals, the chemicals were taken into the body either by swallowing large amounts or by getting large amounts on the skin over a period of time, as in people working in factories using PCBs to manufacture electrical equipment.

The other chemicals besides PCBs in the oily substance spilled on the roadway might cause minor temporary irritations to eyes and throat, and might cause nausea in those smelling these chemicals immediately after the spill. These are temporary symptoms that should disappear in a day or two. They do not cause permanent ill effects.

IS IT DANGEROUS TO WALK WHERE PCBs HAVE BEEN SPILLED? : While there is likely no danger from occasionally walking through these oily spill areas (either barefoot or in shoes), because of the small exposure that would occur, we believe it is wise to avoid these areas unless it is absolutely necessary. If you walk through one of these areas and note an oily substance on your feet or shoes, it should be washed off with soap and water. Contaminated clothing should not be worn until thoroughly washed.

To assure people that the risk of exposure is negligible, the Division of Health Services is conducting a small study of PCB levels in selected individuals who have had the heaviest exposure to these spills.

ARE WELLS, VEGETABLE GARDENS, LIVESTOCK AND PETS LIKELY TO BE CONTAMINATED WITH PCBs? :

PCBs, like other oils, are only slightly soluble in water. Also, they are tightly bound to soil particles where they are deposited and thus do not move great distances in the soil quickly. It is extremely unlikely that residues from these spills will find their way into wells. However, we are checking well water for PCBs where wells are located within just a few feet of the spills. So far results on this testing have been negative.

Livestock should not be allowed to graze on the spill areas. Some of the grass growing by the roadways is contaminated with PCBs. Pets should also be kept out of these areas. PCBs from these spills would be unlikely to contaminate pastures or gardens unless there was immediate run-off at the time of the spill before soaking into the ground or heavy erosion. If this has occurred, do not allow animals to graze in these areas, and do not eat vegetables from contaminated areas.

REMEMBER

(1) There is no immediate danger to anyone's health.

(2) Avoid, as much as possible, walking in the spill areas.

(3) If you do feel you have had PCB exposure to any part of your body, wash with soap and water as soon as possible.

(4) If you feel you have had unusual excessive exposure to PCBs, contact your County Health Department.