PCB - Fish Meal Episode

SENATE UNIT TOLD OF FISH TAINTING

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Chemical Is the Same Found in Chickens Near Factory

By WILLIAM M. BLAIR
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WASHINGTON, Aug. 4—A Senate Commerce subcommittee made public today a report that fish in Alabama had been contaminated with the same industrial chemical found in chickens recently.

The report from the Alabama Department of Conservation showed that polychlorinated biphenyls, known as PCB, in amounts as high as 360 parts per million, or 72 times the guideline set by the Food and Drug Administration, had been found in various species of fish.

The fish contamination was disclosed after Dr. Robert Risebrough, an authority on PCB, told the subcommittee that such chemicals had "become widespread pollutants in the global environment." Dr. Risebrough is a professor at the Institute of Marine Resources of the University of California at Berkeley.

He said that in 1968 there had been an outbreak of a peculiar skin disease, chloroacne, in Japan. This was traced, he said, to a commercial rice oil used for cooking that had been contaminated with PCB.

Nine of the women among 300 persons affected were pregnant, he said, adding that two of the babies were stillborn, and "all showed symptoms of chlorobiphenyl poisoning."

One study, he said, showed the "concentration of PCB in the rice oil was about 200 parts per million and that the oil consumed by a family of four over a month was in the order of 1.8 liters," or one-tenth of a gram.

"I certainly would not advise eating those fish," he said after hearing of the Alabama report from Senator William B. Spong Jr., Democrat of Virginia.

He and a group of representatives of conservation organizations appeared before the subcommittee to testify on the Administration's bill to control toxic chemicals, including PCB.

At the same time, the Public Health and Environment Subcommittee of the House Commerce Committee heard the F.D.A. and the Department of Agriculture accused of failing to "adequately protect the consumer against PCB's and other contaminants."

The charge was made by the Center for the Study of Responsive Law, which was established by Ralph Nader, the consumer advocate. The House panel is hearing testimony on the strengthening of meat and poultry inspection laws.

Peter H. Schuck of the center said neither the F.D.A. nor the Agriculture Department had "hastened" to inform the public of the danger of PCB in chickens, delaying a week after F.D.A. learned of the contamination to announce that a search was under way for contaminated poultry.

The contamination came from a leak in the heating system of a Wilmington, N. C., plant that processed fish meal for use in poultry and livestock feed.

Holly Farms of Wilkesboro, N. C., found that its hatching of eggs had been impaired. It traced the trouble to the fish meal, and notified the Federal agencies. Holly Farms then destroyed about 88,000 chickens.

Sam L. Spencer, Assistant Chief of Fisheries of the Alabama Conservation Department, wrote the Senate subcommittee in May that PCB had been found in fish caught in streams and lakes last year. The fish were catfish, bass, carp and blacktailed redhorse.

Mr. Spencer also said that his department had assisted the F.D.A. in collecting fish samples from Choccolocco Creek and that laboratory tests on the fish had "indicated PCB levels of up to 227 parts per million in catfish." The F.D.A. guideline for PCB is 5 parts per million.

He said that the F.D.A. had sent him copies of a mercury analysis but had not provided the PCB analysis until he wrote asking for the information.

"These results indicated PCB levels up to 227 parts per million, yet the F.D.A apparently did not intend to advise us of this contamination problem," he wrote.

PCB's are similar to DDT, the toxic pesticide. The chemical is insoluble in water but is absorbed by fat. Laboratory tests have shown damage to the liver and other organs of animals as a result of PCB's.

Monsanto Company of St. Louis is the sole manufacturer of the chemical in this country. Monsanto withdrew its product from the market except for use in closed systems because of ecological hazards.

This story was picked up by the wire services and carried by The Evening Star, Washington, D.C. and The Journal of Commerce so far.*

Earlier stories on PCB, carried by the wire services, were picked up by the Buffalo Evening News, The South Bend Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Cortland, N.Y. Standard, Troy, N.Y. Times Record, Philadelphia Inquirer, Birmingham Post-Herald.**

*Before I could mail this I received copies of THE FEED BULLETIN and FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS which also carried story.

**About 20 other papers have carried also.

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