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PCB's Could Be the Next DDT As Residues Are Found in 17 States

Polychlorinated biphenyls have been found at an unexpectedly large number of sampling points in streams, lakes and reservoirs throughout the nation, according to Hans J. Crump-Wiesner, chief chemist of US Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, who has reported findings of an interagency monitoring program concerned with pesticides in water supplies. During the past two years, Mr. Crump-Wiesner's team analyzed over 3,000 water and sediment samples from streams and lakes throughout the US collected from January 1971 to June 1972.

Surprises Never Cease

"We expected to find traces of PCBs at sampling points near industrial centers," Mr. Crump-Wiesner says, "but were surprised to find detectable levels in samples of seventeen of thirty-nine states covered by the sampling."

"We found PCBs in river water, some newly-developed real-estate lakes, and at two US Geological Survey 'benchmark' stations located in relatively remote areas essentially unaffected by man," Mr. Crump-Wiesner says, adding that "we also found lake and stream sediments to have relatively high concentrations of PCB residues. One out of every five bottom sediment samples collected in eighteen states contained significant concentrations of PCBs."

Emphasizing that state and federal health officials have been alerted to the occurences of PCBs, the Survey spokesman notes that "a safe level for PCBs has not been generally accepted to date."

Food & Drug Administration limits the concentration in food products to 5,000 micrograms per kilogram (five pounds per million pounds), and Environmental Protection Agency, in May, 1972, as the result of information obtained in this and other studies, recommended a maximum limit of 0.01 micrograms per liter (one pound in 50 billion quarts) in river and lake water.

The USGS study indicates that detectable concentrations of PCBs in river and lake water ranged from 0.1 to 4.0 micrograms per liter. Concentrations in bottom sediments of streams and lakes ranged from 5.0 to 3,200 micrograms per kilogram.

The PCB findings were first made public in a paper presented to American Chemical Society on August 29 in New York by Mr. Crump-Wiesner, Herman R. Feltz and Marvin L. Yates, of USGS Water Resources Division, Washington, D.C.

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