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PCB PRESS BRIEFING
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We have called this briefing to try to help establish perspective on PCB's, the extent of their presence in the food supply, the implication this has for human health and what the government is doing to define and control the problem generally.

There is today considerable public and some obvious press confusion. Some of this confusion is due to the intense complexity of the PCB issue and to deficient knowledge about the substances in terms of effect on human health.

The confusion is compounded by a few alarmists seeking headlines. Their efforts have in some few cases been aided and abetted by unbalanced reporting.

Public confusion has created public alarm and a feeling of still another crises in the food supply.

I know the confusion is unnecessary and I believe the alarm is greater than the facts will justify.

And this is the reason we have asked you here -- to try to give you the facts that we have, to share with you the limits of our knowledge, to tell you what we are doing with the information we have, what we are doing to get more information and, finally, to answer any questions you may have.

The PCB problem is one which cannot be easily defined. This family of industrial chemicals has been used in countless useful and beneficial ways for more than 40 years. Nevertheless, they have no place in the food

supply. FDA, other agencies of government, and industry itself have been looking at PCB's since at least 1966 to try to keep the chemical out of foods and to try to assess what if anything it means if it should be found in food.

We still have as many questions as answers but we do have some answers. We do know that as a toxic substance PCB's are a potential but not immediate health hazard. We do know that its background level in the environment is not high. But we do not know how long term exposure to PCB might effect human health and we cannot yet explain the inconsistent presence of the chemicals in certain areas of the environment.

We do know there are certain strong reasons for continued use of these chemicals. For example they have important flame resistant properties and properly used, directly assist government and industry in protecting the consumer against fire. We do not know if a requirement for substitute chemicals in some cases might not prove more of a health threat than PCB's.

In recent months we have been faced with PCB adulteration of foods from an industrial accident in North Carolina, from recycled paper packaging and from untraceable environmental causes.

Given the length and variety of uses and given the present intensity of the present search we can be confident that other problems will be found and reported in the weeks and months ahead.

But the overall problem is not new to FDA or to government. FDA developed the technology to identify and measure PCB content in foods and other substances. The Agency at least three years ago established a 5 ppm guideline for PCB in fish. The Agency has consistently backstopped USDA in dealing with the problem whenever it occurred in the poultry industry.

The PCB issue, like NTA and mercury for example, points up the need for Congressional passage of the Administration's Toxic Substances Control Bill. The ultimate solution to the PCB problem, lies, at least in part, in restricting uses to those places where the substances can be safely and beneficially employed. Good progress is being made toward this goal.

But the Toxic Substances Control Bill would clarify and strengthen our authority in this area. Furthermore, it seems clear we will have more PCB "incidents" until a system for pre-testing of such chemicals is established. The Toxic Substances Bill would establish such a system. In fact, the Council on Environmental Quality, in its report of last April entitled "Toxic Substances" used PCB's as one of the examples of substances which the proposed legislation is designed to control.

On another tack I want to remind you that the FDA in full recognition of the fact that the problem of PCB's is broader than any single agency of government, recently took the lead in calling together six major Agencies of the Federal Government. The result was establishment September 1, 1971 of an Inter-Departmental Task Force to coordinate government activities, to facilitate the exchange of information and to do all else possible to bring government resources to bear in defining and dealing with the problem as needed.

I urge your additional attention to the joint press release issued on September 5 about this Task Force. Copies are available.

In a moment I want to ask Deputy FDA Commissioner Grant to give specific citations of actions that FDA and others have taken to meet and reduce health dangers or unwanted adulterations from PCB's.

Before I do, however, I want to make three further and very brief points:

1. We are taking specific, adequate and positive steps to deal with whatever problem or potential problem that PCB's are likely to pose to human health.

2. We reject the need and in fact the feasibility as some have proposed for an outright ban on the substances. Although the use of PCB's requires control, an outright ban is not feasible and would not be in the best interest of the consumer.

3. We further reject the idea that crisis headlines and demands for national health alerts are justified or needed to meet the situation as we know it today. Science does not support such actions and we in FDA will continue to abide by the dictates of science in making regulatory judgments in behalf of the American consumer.

Thank You---