

# PBB Found in Mother's Milk

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After being dropped by the media as no longer newsworthy, and being submerged in a myriad of bureaucratic committees on the State Legislature—a process so utterly boring that we have failed to follow its developments (you'll forgive us, won't you?)—the issue of PBB (polybrominated biphenyl, a component of a fire-retardant chemical which was introduced by mistake into Michigan livestock feed starting in 1973) has again hit the headlines, this time in a particularly gruesome development. (See "PBB: Case Study of an Industrial Plague," FE May 1976).

PBB has been found in the breast milk of twenty-two of twenty-six Michigan mothers studied by the state. According to state public health director Dr. Maurice Reizen, preliminary tests indicate that PBB may be present in the milk of "a majority" of new mothers in Michigan, especially in the lower peninsula.

A University of Michigan researcher advised new mothers to stop breast feeding immediately. Though no one knows exactly what the effects of PBB on human beings are, there is mounting evidence that the chemical is cancer-causing.

The families of farmers whose livestock was affected most heavily by PBB poisoning have exhibited such symptoms as extensive liver and bone marrow damage, abnormal blood counts and signs of arthritis. None of the women in the breast-milk study, however, were from farms where such livestock was quarantined. They were from various counties around the state, including Wayne County.

Dr. Reizen said state health officials have known since 1974 that women on these farms showed higher levels of PBB in their milk, mainly because they ate much of the food products directly from the farms.

"But now we have evidence that the problem may include a majority of new mothers, especially those in the Lower Peninsula," Dr. Reizen said. "We can only guess that enough PBB entered the food chain in Michigan to cause it to show up now in human milk." Which means, in effect, that a good number of us in Michigan, men, women and children, are victims of the PBB plague.

Another startling discovery was also made, that eleven of the twenty-six women showed traces of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) in their milk. A spokesman for the federal Environmental Protection Agency has said that more than half of all Americans have that industrial chemical in their fat and milk.

Eat hardy.

See related story in this issue: Capitalism's Industrial Plagues



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