
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



29 Hazen Drive, Concord, New Hampshire 03301 • (603) 271-3503 • www.des.nh.gov

ARD-19

2004

Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)

Polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, are synthetically manufactured chemicals belonging to a family of organic compounds known as chlorinated hydrocarbons. They are very stable chemicals with a heavy oil-like consistency, and were produced in the United States from 1929 to 1977. Their properties include low water solubility, high boiling point, low flammability and low electrical conductivity. Because of their chemical properties, most PCBs were used as dielectric fluids in electrical equipment such as transformers, capacitors, switches, and voltage regulators. Most of the PCB containing electrical equipment has been removed from service and the PCBs destroyed.

PCBs were also used in small appliances until 1978 when they were outlawed. Prior to this time, many household appliances, often referred to as white goods, contained small oil filled capacitors filled with very high concentrations of PCBs. PCB oil-filled small capacitors may be found in air conditioners, fluorescent light ballasts, dehumidifiers, microwave ovens, electric frying pans, submersible pumps, mercury vapor lamps, and electrical control panels.

Proper handling, storage, and disposal of fluorescent light fixtures, capacitors, and white goods containing PCBs is very important. There is the potential for harm to public health and the environment if these PCB-containing items are not handled and disposed of properly.

For more information

For information about PCBs, its health effects, laws and regulations, listing of waste handlers, and more, go to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website at www.epa.gov/opptintr/pcb/.