

PAGE 12, SECTION 1 WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1979

Male fertility declining; toxic chemicals blamed

WASHINGTON (UPI) — A chemist raised a possible new environmental problem Tuesday with a report that sperm density and thus male fertility potential appear to be declining, and that toxic chemicals may be responsible.

Dr. Ralph Daugherty, a Florida State University professor, told a meeting of the American Chemical Society his findings are tentative but are serious enough to merit further study.

Daugherty said there have been several reports in scientific literature in Europe and Japan, as well as in the United States, suggesting — but not proving — that sperm density has decreased during the last 20 years.

A 1929 study found a distribution maximum of 100 million sperm per milliliter of fluid, he said, while one in 1977 found the greatest number of sperm had a density of 50 million per milliliter.

Financier dies

NEW YORK (UPI) — Andre Meyer, 81, head of Lazard Freres & Co., the investment banking house, died Sunday in a Lausanne, Switzerland, hospital.

In the Florida State study conducted during the past year, more infants — 25 percent — had a density of 50 million than any other level. Many specialists, Daugherty said, consider such a density to be evidence of sterility.

But Daugherty noted that infants in general may have lower sperm densities due to sociological and behavioral factors such as increased stress and more sexual activity.

Nevertheless, he said an examination of seminal fluid from the 122 college students revealed contamination with several toxic substances which could inhibit sperm development.

He said there was a strong correlation between toxic industrial compounds known as PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, and decreased sperm density. This trend is to be expected, he said, because PCBs are known to be mutagenic and carcinogenic, resulting from metabolism of DDT.

Although there has been no published research linking PCBs with decreased sperm density in humans, animal studies have shown they can cause reproductive problems.

PCBs are used primarily in the manufacture of synthetic insulators and capacitors and their production has been curtailed sharply in recent years.

In another report to the chemical society meeting, Dr. Thomas Murphy of DePaul University said that although most uses of PCBs have been banned, the compounds still remain in the air and an estimated 1.5 tons per year, for example, are deposited in Lake Huron and larger amounts fall on Chicago.

Murphy said the sources of the airborne PCBs probably include municipal incinerators, gases emanating from landfills and the evaporation of spilled PCBs and those used in paints.

Daugherty said toxic substances act on sperm density by decreasing the rate of cell division. It takes at least eight divisions to produce a single sperm, he said, an inhibitor which inhibits division can have a dramatic effect.

"The cause for the apparent decrease in sperm density and thus male fertility potential is not clear at this point," Daugherty said. "I believe the data provide a presumption that we ought to look into the problem."

Daugherty's research was supported by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and he was aided by Dr. B. W. Skene of the Environmental Protection Agency's laboratories in Health, Mead.



Snail darter

Two preserved specimens of the snail darter, a small, leg, and trunk, lie on the head of a biologist. Made in the States, following the lead of the lower house, voted to grant the bill. The bill, which would exempt the snail darter from the Endangered Species Act, and any law that might prohibit its collection.

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