Frequently Asked Questions About **PCBs**

What are PCBs?

- Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are a group of human-made chemicals. There are hundreds of different types of PCBs.
- PCBs were once used widely as coolants and lubricants in transformers and other electrical equipment. Due to the evidence that PCBs build up in the environment, the United States banned the use of PCBs in the late 1970s. Old electric equipment including transformers may still contain PCBs.
- These chemicals take a long time to break down in the environment and to exit the human body. This means you may still be exposed to PCBs, or they might still be in your body from past exposures.

How are people exposed to PCBs?

- Eating food containing PCBs, especially foods with higher fat content such as dairy products, meat, fish and game.
- Using fluorescent lighting fixtures, electrical devices and appliances that were made before 1980, which may leak small amounts of PCBs into the air.

- Breathing dust or eating dirt containing PCBs.
- Breathing in PCBs during work. Work that commonly involves PCBs includes the repair, maintenance and disposal of PCB transformers, fluorescent lights and electrical devices built before 1980, and incineration of industrial waste.

How can PCBs harm people's health?

- Studies of people who worked with PCBs suggest that exposure to high amounts of PCBs can increase the risk of health effects, including:
    - Acne-like rash (chloracne) and liver damage.
    - Cancer of the liver and biliary tract.
- Studies of infants born to mothers who were exposed to PCBs through work or eating contaminated fish suggest high amounts of PCBs may increase the risk of health effects in infants, including:
    - Harm to development, behavior, learning and the immune system.
- Studies of animals exposed to PCBs have found the health effects listed above, as well as evidence for:
    - Anemia, hormone disruption, stomach and thyroid gland damage, and harm to the reproductive system.

How can people reduce their exposure to PCBs?

- Follow Eat Safe Fish guidelines for sport-caught fish. Guidelines are available at Michigan.gov/eatsafefish.
- Thoroughly clean produce and peel the outer skin from root vegetables (e.g., carrots, beets, turnips) to remove dirt.
- When working at a job with the potential for PCBs exposure:
    - Practice good personal hygiene by washing hands often, especially before eating or drinking, and by showering after working.
    - Use personal protective equipment (PPE) as directed.
    - Do not eat, drink, smoke or vape in the workplace.

Questions?

Call 1-800-648-6942 or visit Michigan.gov/DEHBio and click on “MiChEM” to view additional resources.