POLYCHLORINATED BIPHENYLS (PCBs)

300 Park Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046

What are PCBs?

PCBs are a group of man-made compounds that were widely used from approximately 1929 until the U.S. ban in 1979. They were utilized mainly in electrical equipment, because of their non-flammability and stability. PCBs have no known taste or smell and range in consistency from oil to a waxy solid.

PCBs and the Environment

PCBs still exist in our air, soil and water from previous releases. Because of their stability, PCBs do not break down in the environment. They often attach to sediment that is washed into our local waterbodies, the Potomac River, and the Chesapeake Bay. PCBs accumulate in organisms found in these waterways and can cause serious health concerns for citizens who consume contaminated fish and shellfish.

Products that may contain PCBs

PCBs may be present in products and materials produced before the 1979 PCB ban. Older products that may contain PCBs include:

- Transformers and capacitors
- Electrical equipment (voltage regulators, switches, re-closers, bushings, etc.)
- Oil used in motors and hydraulic systems
- Old electrical devices or appliances containing PCB capacitors
- Fluorescent light ballasts
- Cable insulation
- Thermal insulation material including fiberglass, felt, foam, and cork
- Adhesives and tapes
- Oil-based paint
- Caulk
- Plastics
- Floor finishes

Preventing the Release of PCBs

Caution must be taken to prevent release of PCBs through:

- Spills and leaks from equipment (especially electrical equipment)
- Improper disposal and storage of equipment
- Illegal or improper dumping of PCB-containing wastes
- Burning of PCB-containing wastes

It is important to also minimize the amount of PCBs in the environment by:

- Properly replacing all PCB-containing fluorescent light ballasts
- Properly disposing of caulk, paint and other PCB-containing building materials during planned renovations and repairs
- Taking precautions during renovations so that PCB-containing building material does not contaminate surrounding surfaces
- Utilizing trained and licensed contractors to remove, clean-up and dispose of PCB-containing materials
- Consulting with City officials when questions regarding PCBs arise

More Information on PCBs

To learn more about PCBs visit:

- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (www.deq.virginia.gov)
- Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov/pcbs)

Fluorescent light ballasts (FLBs) can contain PCBs and should be removed and disposed of by trained professionals.

PCB-contaminated transformers that contain more than 50 ppm of PCBs are subject to specific EPA regulations. Proper PCB identification labels must be visible near the access and on the transformer itself.

Old paint and caulk, including surrounding substrate such as brick, masonry, cinder block, wood, etc., can create dust containing PCBs during renovations. Care must be taken during removal of these materials and they must be disposed of properly.