

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS
**PCBs leak
confirmed at
County Center**

5-29-85
SANTA CRUZ — A substance which dripped from a light ballast onto a worker and the floor of the County Center last week has been found to contain PCBs.

Ray Talley, chief of environmental health, said tests for PCBs in the light ballast and a carpet sample taken from the Superior Court clerk's office on the first floor were positive. The amount of PCBs in the swatch of carpet was very small, he added.

More samples of the worker's blood and his shirt are being taken, but the results won't be known for a couple of weeks, said Talley.

The ballast was being changed as part of an ongoing county program to replace light fixtures suspected of containing PCBs. These PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — are known to cause cancer in animals and suspected of doing the same to humans, said Talley.

At one time, PCBs were used extensively in light fixtures, electrical transformers and similar devices as insulators. They were banned in 1979 after the animal studies showed a link between exposure and cancer.

"It (the light exchange) was supposed to be a preventive measure," said Talley.

Some kerosene-doused rags that were used to wipe the floor and walls where the PCBs dripped did not show traces of the substance, he said.

The concentration of PCBs in the light ballast is unknown because solvents were added to it, said Talley.

"We do know it (the concentration) was 11 milligrams per sample, which is quite a bit," he said. "But we don't know how large the sample was."