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E.P.A. AIDE WARNS OF TOXIC LEAKAGE

Says 10 Million Pounds of PCB Chemical Are Lost to Environment Yearly

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Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, Nov. 19—A chemist for the Environmental Protection Agency estimated today that at least 10 million pounds of the toxic chemicals known as polychlorinated biphenals are "lost into the environment each year through vaporization, leaks and spills."

The chemist, Thomas E. Kopp of E.P.A.'s Office of Toxic substances in Washington, gave the estimate at the beginning of a three-day conference on polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCB's, being conducted here by the environmental agency.

Mr. Kopp said that at least 10 plants in the United States were dumping PCB's directly into waterways and that two others were pouring the chemicals into municipal sewage systems. PCB's are not removed by any known sewage treatment process and are thus presumed to remain in the treated sewage.

The chemicals are used in the manufacture of electrical capacitors and transformers. They are useful in closed electrical systems because they conduct heat but not electricity. The only substitutes for them are highly flammable.

Chemically, PCB's and the pesticide DDT are similar in construction and are not readily biodegradable in the environment.

Found in Drinking Water

The E.P.A. Administrator, Russell E. Train, who opened the conference, said that research conducted thus far by his agency had uncovered PCB's in the drinking water of Winnebago, Ill., and Sellersburg, Ind., and that it was suspected that the chemicals were in the drinking water of Bridgeport, Conn., Escondido, Calif., and New Bedford, Mass.

PCB's have caused liver cancer and reproductive failures in laboratory animals. At two General Electric plants north of Albany, N.Y., workers using the chemicals in the manufacture of capacitors have complained of allergic dermatitis, nausea, dizzyness, eye irritation, nasal irritation, asthmatic bronchitis and fungus.

Last Aug. 7, New York's Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, Ogden R. Reid, said that striped bass from the Hudson River and salmon from Lake Ontario contained dangerously high levels of PCB's, and he warned consumers not to eat these fish. He has also ordered the General Electric Company to stop discharging PCB's into the Hudson River by Sept. 30, 1976, a date the company says it does not have the technical competence to meet.

Mr. Kopp said the following plants were discharging PCB's directly into waterways:

The Cornell-Dubilier Electric Corporation, and Aerovox Industries, Inc., both of New Bedford, Mass.; the Westinghouse Corporation, in Bloomington, Ind., and Sharon, Pa.; the Sangamo Electrical Company, Pickens, S. C.; General Electric at Rome, Ga., Pittsfield, Mass., Fort Edward, N. Y., and Hudson Falls, N. Y., and the Universal Manufacturing Corporation, Totowa, N. J.

Further Discharges

He said that Universal was discharging PCB's into the Bridgeport, Conn., sewage system and that the manufacturer of PCB-laden Aroclor, the Monsanto Chemical Company, was losing some of its PCB's into the sewage treatment facilities in Sauget, Ill.

Mr. Train observed that PCB's "are present in our environment to a far greater degree and at higher levels than we have previously thought," but he said he was reluctant to order any individual factories to stop dumping the chemicals by using Section 504 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Amendments Act of 1972.

"Conceivably, it could give you authority to halt PCB's, but there is a question as to whether it would hold up in court," Mr. Train said. "I am not entirely decided on whether we can use it—it would be a very difficult route to go."

Mr. Train's caution did not sit well with some environmentalists from New York, who told him that in the Hudson Valley, E.P.A. stands for "Everyone's Polluting Again."

Mr. Train replied that he wanted to see evidence that anyone had indicated his agency was indifferent to the PCB problem.

In the meantime, Federal researchers are having a difficult time in determining where PCB's are coming from in all instances. Winnebago, for example, is not close to a plant using PCB's in the manufacturing process.

"What we are doing now is detective work," said Mr. Kopp.

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