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Forecast

Portland Weather Service

Showers tonight and early tomorrow, low tonight in Sta. Partly clearing, colder tomorrow afternoon and night, high in eve-

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Health Peril Seen in GE Transformer Oil

BY MICHAEL E. WOOD

A substance in Pyroval, the insulating oil used by General Electric Co. in small and medium-sized transformers, is viewed as a health hazard by officials of seven Federal agencies.

Polychlorinated biphenyl, or PCB, as the substance is called, is said to be even more dangerous than DDT.

Like DDT, it resists decomposition and thus persists in the environment for years.

from Monsanto Chemical Co. in St. Louis and mixes it with oil and other substances to come up with Pyronal.

Pyrowal — that's a GE trade name — is used because it is heat-resistant. PCB is said to withstand temperatures of up to 1,000 degrees.

Used for 20 Years

A company spokesman said today that Pyral's "self-sealing" allows transformers to be installed inside buildings, factories, mines, subways, schools and electric locomotives. The transformers are low-

etically model, the spokesman said, and thus the Pyrene is there does not come in contact with the environment.

Pyrexal, which has been in use here for some 20 years, is stored at the company's oil farm on East Street.

A new oil storage installation, considered to be leak-proof, was opened in 1994. But prior to that, leakage from GE's old underground oil system saturated the ground and was a major cause of pollution to the Housatonic River. Some of that leakage was Pyrene, not an ordinary oil.

Before developing Pyromal, GE used regular oil in oil transformers. But oil has a low boiling temperature, which caused transformer fires in some cases. GE's large transformers still are insulated with regular oil.

Considered Better

But for small and medium-sized transformers, Pyromat is considered preferable because it is safer. "It's another advantage," the GE spokesman said today, "is that transformers insulated in this way can be smaller in size than oil-filled or air-cooled units."

As a result of mounting concern over the effects of TV on children, the company has moved the problem forward in its position-control priorities, says spokeswoman. But he added, "In spite of the fact that many companies, including GE, have invested research money to develop a substitute involving brainwaves having similar or better properties has been de-

Shaky But Up
The New York Times reported today that large amounts of SWN have been found in about

meat, turkeys, salmon, eggs and fish meat over the last few months.

The President's Office of Science and Technology and its Council on Environmental Quality formed a study run weeks ago to investigate the presence of PCBs in food and other compounds.

concluded that PCB "concentrations may reach levels sufficient to damage ecosystems irreversibly on a worldwide scale before the damage is recognized."

added, "Their entry into the market is every practical test, even if this requires restrictions on their production and use."

The sudden accumulation of PCB in the environment is what is alarming scientists, James D. Grant, deputy commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, told the Times. "We want PCB out of the food supply, but we don't yet regard it as an imminent hazard to health."

To date, there have been only a few incidents linking FOM with health hazards to humans.