Toxic Materials News

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SLANTS & TRENDS

ARE PCBS REALLY A HEALTH RISK? That's the question being posed today at a seminar held by Environmental Protection Agency due to a new study by the electric utility industry that claims PCBs might not be as dangerous as once believed. That claim is backed up by Monsanto Co., which released a review of PCB health effects as TMN goes to press. Monsanto claims that there is "no link with human cancer" and that PCBs are not "deadly toxins."

GOVERNMENT SCIENTISTS seem to be taking the study cautiously and one pointed out that there has never been solid information that PCBs cause cancer in humans or just how dangerous they really are. If it turns out that PCBs are not the threat once believed, EPA cannot be blammed for jumping the gun and overregulating at its own discretion. Remember, Congress demanded that the "mad dog of the environment" be removed.

DESPITE THE NEW STUDY ON PCBS, one industry spokesman told TMN that chemical industry is not giving the fire retardant a clean bill of health. There are still problems with the chemical that cause them concern. Spokesman said that there are no plans to bring PCBs back on the market, but that federal regulations should be reflective of the latest evidence on toxicity and hazard.

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IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED... A third reorganization of EPA's enforcement office is looming on the horizon and details could be available on the latest changes this week, agency staff told TMN. The new lawship chiefs have asked staff attorneys in Office of Enforcement Counsel to submit a list of which environmental laws they are experienced with and to list other projects that they would not mind working on. EPA staff said they believe that Bob Perry, head of the enforcement program, is considering shuffling attorneys around the various OEC divisions.

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FACED WITH A DETERIORATING ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGE, EPA head Anne Gorsuch is taking steps to improve the agency's public image. She has hired a public relations consultant, Donald Ferguson of Entercom, Inc., Denver Colo., to help out. With all the problems the economy is slated to cause for the GOP this November, sources say that the agency is under pressure from the White House to stay out of the press, unless there is something positive to say. Supposedly, Ferguson will be able to reverse the flood of critical reports on EPA's poor staff morale, lack of enforcement and seemingly weak commitment to environmental protection. Let's see.

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