56-53A CLEAN WATER REPORT
E.O.W.

DEC 5 1975

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AT LEAST 10-MILLION POUNDS OF PCBs are lost into the environment each year through vaporization, leaks and spills, Thomas E. Kopp, a chemist with Environmental Protection Agency, estimated during the opening of EPA's conference on PCBs in Chicago last month. Outlining the extent of the PCB problem, Kopp said that at least 10 plants are dumping PCBs directly into U.S. waterways and another two are discharging the chemicals into

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municipal sewage treatment systems. Since PCBs are not removed by any known sewage treatment process they are assumed to remain in sewage effluent. For more on the conference see story on page 239.

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## REGULATORY ACTIONS FAIL TO CURB PCB PRESENCE IN ENVIRONMENT, TRAIN SAYS

Pointing to an increased presence of polychlorinated biphenyls in the environment despite regulatory action, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Russell E. Train took the opportunity of EPA's conference on PCBs last month to urge adoption of toxic substances control legislation. Without authority of such legislation, he said, an estimated 600 chemicals are introduced into commercial use each year with no "systematic, advance assessment of their potential impact upon public health."

Under the current regulatory scheme the Food and Drug Administration and EPA took action to lower PCB levels in food and water, Train noted. Other countries have limited PCB use, he added. Such actions were expected to "take care of the PCB problem, but "instead, more than three years later, we find that, although PCB levels in food have steadily declined, PCBs are present in our environment to a far greater degree and at higher levels than we have previously thought... The evidence we have accumulated over the past three years has underscored our original concern over the toxicity of PCBs and over the potential health hazard posed by the presence of high PCB concentrations in waterways, in water supplies and in fish."

There is a possibility of ordering individual plants to cease the discharge of PCBs under Section 504, the emergency powers provision of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, but Train expressed hesitancy at using that provision. "Conceivably it could give you authority to halt PCBs, but there is a question as to whether it would hold up in court," Train explained. "I am not entirely decided on whether we can use it -- it would be a very difficult route to go."

### All Sources of PCBs in Environment Should be Eliminated in Three Years

Immediate goal of regulators, according to Assistant Secretary of Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Nathaniel Reed, should be elimination of all sources of PCBs in the environment within three years. Toward this end, he supported a national ban on use of all domestic and imported PCBs other than in transformers and capacitors. Latter uses should be reviewed in light of potential replacement products, he said, adding that prior to use of alternatives, intensive evaluation of hazards associated with substitute chemicals must be undertaken.

For the long term, Reed pointed out, legislation that will preclude new "PCBs" from being discharged into the environment must be pursued. "The passage of an effective toxic substances act and the complete control of PCB importation are imperative to the health of the American people." A substance by substance approach to control of toxics only delays and hampers efforts to regulate the occurrence of poisons in the environment, he concluded.

In Washington meanwhile, Environmental Defense Fund and Natural Resources Defense Council filed petition with FDA seeking an immediate lowering of permissible levels of PCBs in human food and an eventual ban on foods containing those chemicals. FDA should lower the currant permitted level of 5 parts per million of PCBs in fish, petition contended.

At the Chicago conference, NRDC's A. Karim Ahmen said the environmental group also supports a phaseout of all uses of PCBs, as well as a ban on import and export of the chemicals; development of a PCB use and consumption inventory to pinpoint all discharges of the substances into the environment; an accelerated program of monitoring and surveillance of PCBs in fish, wildlife and foods by state and Federal agencies; moratorium on all dredging of river bottoms until a study is conducted to examine resultant resuspension of PCBs in river water; and promulgation by EPA of toxic standards for PCBs such that water in receiving streams has a maximum 0.001 parts per billion level, as well as swift passage of legislation authorizing control of all toxic substances.