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Claim PCB Ban Harms Economy

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Banning the use of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBS) was described Friday by electrical and paper industries as hazardous to economic health.

But a University of Wisconsin professor said levels of the toxic industrial chemicals are building up in human beings and some of the food they eat.

A federal official said an outright ban is essential if PCBs in the environment are to be reduced.

The sharply differing attitudes toward controlling longlasting and potentially harmful pollutants surfaced in testimony before the Assembly Environmental Quality Committee on a bill by Rep. Mary Lou Munts, D-Madison.

Her measure would prohibit the sale, manufacture or use of the controversial chemical in Wisconsin after Feb. 1, 1977.

"You have to cut off the source," Karl Bremer, an official of the Environmental Protection Agency's Chicago office, testified.

"The front-end approach (banning PCBs altogether) is a practical approach in dealing with the PCB problem," he said.

That would mean that nobody could turn on a fluorescent light, refrigerator or television set because all have components that now contain PCBs, N. Ray Clark of Bridgeport, Conn., argued.

Testifying in behalf of the Electrical Industries Association, Clark suggested that Wisconsin leave regulation of PCBs to the industry and the federal government.

Mrs. Munts introduced the bill at the request of the Natural Resources Board.

She said one of her main concerns is the effect PCBs might have on Lake Michigan's commercial fishery.

Lake trout, coho salmon and chubs caught in the Great Lakes have contained levels of PCBs exceeding the Food and Drug Administration's recommended tolerance limit of five parts per million, Bremer said.

Dr. James Allen, pathology professor at the University of Wisconsin, said he is conducting research with rhesus monkeys that will indicate whether humans eating two meals of fish a week containing those levels of PCB might be risking their health.

Japanese who ate rice oil contaminated with PCBs in 1968 are still ill, and monkeys fed a dose of PCB about equal to the contents of a cold capsule still show the effects 30 months later, Allen said.

"I feel quite strongly that legislation should be enacted to regulate the distribution of these materials," he said. "We do not know what the danger of these compounds is."

Irvin Charney of Milwaukee, representing Fort Howard Paper Co. of Green Bay, said the bill could jeopardize "hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin jobs."

"How do you balance public health concerns against the loss of jobs? Elected officials should take the responsibility for making the decisions," Charney said.

He said PCBs are a national problem and cannot be handled by an attempt to ban them.

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