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S.C. Plant Develops Substitute For PCBs

COLUMBIA—The Greenwood-based division of one of the country's leading producers of high-voltage electrical capacitors announced Thursday it has developed a safer, more biodegradable substitute for environmentally hazardous polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and will make the substitute available to other manufacturers of power systems.

H.R. Keith, general manager of the McGraw-Edison Company's power systems division plant in Greenwood, told a press conference that company researchers began a search for a safe alternative to PCBs in 1971, when evidence on the dangers of the compound first came to light.

PCBs have been identified as a hazard to human health, causing ill effects including cancer, skin irritation and damage to the nervous and reproductive systems. They are not biodegradable, and are thus persist in the environment.

Keith said McGraw-Edison scientists working in conjunction with the Dow Chemical Co. developed Edisol, the trade name for as a substitute for PCBs in electrical insulating fluid.

The plant will discontinue its own use of PCBs, Keith said.

The decision was made to switch to Edisol, he said, only after extensive tests conducted over a four-year period, had convinced company officials of its safety.

In his Thursday announcement, Keith said that McGraw-Edison will sell Edisol to any companies in the same line of business who are interested in eliminating PCBs in their manufacturing process. Edisol will, however, cost 15 per cent more than PCBs, he said.

News of the McGraw-Edison decision came just two days after Congress gave its final approval to the Toxic Sub-

stances Control Act, a measure that would ban PCBs altogether within two years.

Scientists have been working for some time to develop an environmentally acceptable PCB replacement that would be as effective for use in electrical capacitors and transformers and would prove to be as fire-resistant and chemically stable as PCBs.

Keith did not comment on the fire-resistant properties of Edisol, but said the substance is biodegradable and "will not accumulate in the food chain."

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...PCBs

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PCBs characteristically concentrate as they move up the food chain, and varying amounts have been found in fish and wildlife in most parts of the country.

Last month, it was announced that PCBs had been found in excess of the FDA-approved human consumption limit of five parts per billion (ppb) in fish caught in the Twelve Mile Creek arm of Lake Hartwell, where the Sangamo Electric Company has been dumping its treated wastewater. Sangamo uses PCBs in the manufacture of electrical capacitors.

The Monsanto Corp. has been the only manufacturer, distributor and vendor of PCBs in the United States. Commenting on McGraw-Edison's plans to enter the power capacitor insulation fluid market, Monsanto spokesman Dan Bishop said, "It won't have an effect on us. It's all kind of moot because we've announced our intentions to get out of the PCB market by the end of 1977."

Bishop added, "Edisol is only a replacement for 15 per cent of the market. It's used only in high-voltage capacitors, which is a small portion of the capacitor market."

Monsanto, he said, is still working on a safe, effective replacement for the major part of the PCB market, but has yet to develop anything acceptable.

Because it manufacturers PCBs, Monsanto has been named a co-defendant in two class-action lawsuits—one asking \$500 million in damages, the other \$1 million—in which users of PCBs allowed the hazardous compound to enter the environment, poisoning waterways and fish.