Paper Industry Says It's Whipping Boy in Controversy Over PCBs

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Wisconsin paper industry has been made the whipping boy in controversy surrounding the industrial chemical polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), industry spokesmen charged Thursday.

"No one can deny that the proposed Department of Natural Resources regulations are aimed most directly at the waste paper recycling industry in Wisconsin," said attorney Donald Bach, representing the Wisconsin Paper Council.

Yet, Bach told a DNR hearing, not enough is known about PCB pollution "to take a stand such as proposed in these ill thought-out proposals."

"I have seen no conclusive published report relating to the death of any wildlife species because of the presence of PCB's," he said. "The only reported mortalities have been those achieved in laboratory experiments."

Rep. Les Aspin, D-Wis., and Lt. Gov. Martin Schreiber supported the DNR proposal, which calls for regulating or prohibiting discharge of PCB's into the environment.

Howard Ness of the National Association of Recycling Industries said proposed limitations on PCB discharge rates "are unrealistic and would have a devastating effect" on the industry.

He said while recycling companies would do their share in cleaning up the environment, "to saddle us with the total blame is unfair."

He predicted that overly-restrictive controls would cause loss of jobs, a halt to industrial expansion and a decline in tax money paid to the state.

PCBs, toxic industrial chemicals, have been widely used for nearly 50 years in such products as insulating and hydraulic fluids, paints, ink, adhesives and carbonless carbon paper.

Monsanto Chemical Co., sole producer of PCBs in the United States, has restricted PCB sales in recent years.

W.B. Papageorge, product acceptability manager, said Monsanto currently sells PCBs only to the electric industry for use in transformers and capacitors. Current production is about 40 million pounds a year, he said.

More than 1,500 scientific reports have been prepared on PCBs, he noted, but "many early reports havee been discounted."

He said a company-run study on employes at its PCB plant near St. Louis showed no health differences between Monsanto workers and other area residents.

Stanton Kleinert, chief of the DNR surveillance section, said many sources of PCBs have been found in Wisconsin, although most contained only trace amounts.

"Atmospheric fallout and waste recycling account for greater amounts," he said.

He said high levels of PCBs have been found in some Wisconsin fish.

"Many fish from Green Bay, Lake Michigan, the Upper Mississippi, and the Fox River near Portage exceed safe PCB levels" established by the Food and Drug Administration, he said.

Norm Kirschbaum of the state Department of Agriculture said the department has a continuous fish monitoring program, primarily aimed at wholesale distributing points and fisheries, but also including a few retail outlets.

He said two lots of Green Bay carp were destroyed after a check showed they contained levels of 8.9 parts per million and 23.4 parts per million.

The tolerance level for human consumption, as set by federal standards, is 5 parts per million in fish.

Kirschbaum said another 12,-000 pounds of Green Bay fish have been placed under a holding order because they contain PCB levels ranging from 13.1 parts per million to 57.5 parts per million.

The FDA also has found shipments of carp rom Lake Pepin with excessive PCB levels, resulting in orders to halt commerical carp fishing in the lake.

Dr. Harold Humphrey, environmentalist epidemiologist with the Michigan Department of Health said "continued levels of PCBs in Great Lakes fish have failed to show improvement."

Humphrey said he is conducting a study among residents of four Michigan communities along Lake Michigan.

The subjects are divided into two groups: fish eaters and persons who eat little or no fish.

A preliminary finding shows no statistical difference between the groups in responses to a questionnaire regarding health problems, he said.

Dr. J. R. Allen, University of Wisconsin pathologist, said high levels of PCBs given Rhesus monkeys result in symptoms similar to those observed in a PCB outbreak in the 60s in Japan.

These include loss of hair, swelling of the face, accumulation of fluid under the skin, ache and loss of eyelashes.

The chemical also affected the reproductive ability of female monkeys, he said.

The amounts ranged from 300 parts per million to 2.5 parts per million and were part of the animals' daily diet, he said.

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