

PCB pollution has extended even to such remote spots as this lake in South Africa.

SAFETY & HEALTH

The evidence mounts against PCBs

For the first time, PCBs, a group of chemicals that have long been suspected of causing illnesses ranging from dermatitis to cancer, have been pinpointed as the cause of several industrial cancer deaths. Mobil Corp. announced that 7 out of 92 workers who were exposed to PCBs from 1958 to 1958 at its Paulsboro (N.J.) refinery developed cancer. Six have now died, and Mobil says two of the deaths are attributable to PCBs, which the company used to make process catalysts at that time. And in an unpublished study, Monsanto Co., the sole U.S. producer of the chemicals, reports that an abnormally high number of its deceased workers had died of lung cancer.

The fatality reports added further emphasis to announcements this week that PCBs, which are widely used as insulating fluids in transformers and capacitors, are more prevalent than anyone had previously suspected. The Environmental Protection Agency has found PCBs in mothers' milk in tests in 10 states. And Yvonne and Algirdas Greichus, researchers from South Dakota State University, told an American Chemical Society convention that PCBs have shown up in dangerous quantities in such unlikely places as lakes near South Africa's Hartebeestoort Dam.

Federal limits. These disclosures further complicate an already complex legal battle between electrical equipment manufacturers, environmentalists, and the EPA. In July the agency called for a reduction of PCBs in a plant's effluent discharge to no more than one part per billion by January, 1978. Most users say they cannot possibly meet this deadline, and they will ask for a one-year extension.

Monsanto has told users it will end PCB production by late 1977 and that its stockpiles will be depleted by May, 1978—a few months past the January deadline. "Why spend millions [for effluent-control equipment] to cut discharges for six months?" asks Clifford H. Tuttle, president of Aerovox Industries Inc., a manufacturer of electrical equipment. He says that the industry is 18 to 22 months away from converting to substitutes for PCBs.

For its part, the EPA is sympathetic to the industry's plight. "The proposed regulations do present some difficulties to the users," notes R. Kent Ballentine, an engineer in EPA's standards division.

But the agency's hands may be tied. It recently signed a consent agreement to end an environmentalist-sponsored lawsuit that would have forced it to step up control of toxic substances. Under the agreement, EPA must immediately start setting up standards for several toxics, including PCBs. By law, it must enforce the PCB standard within a year of its enactment. The Agency has already asked Congress for legislation that might allow it to extend the PCB-enforcement deadline. Aside from EPA's moves, the House and Senate have passed separate bills banning PCB production, but have not resolved differences in conference. ■

CALIFORNIA

An environmental law business can live with

Six months ago, California's businessmen were almost unanimous in their opposition to proposed restrictions on development of the state's coast. They claimed the rules, which would have restricted new building to an area 1,000 yd. to as much as 5 mi. inland, would add millions of dollars to the cost of coastline projects, endangering 25% of the state's economy.

But by the time the California legislature passed its long-awaited coastal protection bill last week, business had almost completely withdrawn its opposition. Most businessmen still wish the law were more lenient, but they seem to feel it could have been much worse. "We got as much as we could," says Michael R. Peevey, executive director of the California Council for Environmental & Economic Balance, a consortium of 20 major corporations and 19 labor groups. "We are convinced now that business will be able to live with coastal controls in California."

This optimism stems for the most part from a substantial reduction in both the amount of land covered—now generally no more than 1,000 yd. inland—and in the type of development that the law places under a newly formed Coastal Commission's jurisdiction. The original proposal gave the

The land-use controls are less stringent than opponents feared

Coastal Commission veto power over the Energy Commission on power-plant sites and allowed it to kill new petroleum facilities if it deemed the public need for them insufficient. The new law leaves the Energy Commission with authority to site power plants, although the Coastal Commission can bar energy development in particularly scenic areas.

Authority given. Nonetheless, the coastal law is still a strong one. Its genesis dates back to 1972, when California voters approved Proposition 20 regulating coastal development, first with state and regional coastal commissions and later with permanent legislation. The new law creates the Coastal Commission and requires local communities to amend their plans to meet state standards. And it gives the commission appeal authority over local land-use decisions on the coast.

The regulations are viewed as a landmark in land-use planning. "For

MONS 034316