

AIR/WATER pollution report.

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SLANTS & TRENDS

BARRING LAST-MINUTE CHANGE OF STRATEGY, major U.S. auto manufacturers will give little or no support to bill proposed by Sen. Robert Griffin (R.-Mich.), granting car makers antitrust immunity for cooperative research on ways to meet 1975-76 anti-pollution standards. Sen. Philip Hart (D.-Mich.), whose antitrust subcommittee must first clear the measure, disfavours writing new loopholes into antitrust laws, yet is reluctant to offend United Auto Workers union, which first suggested the legislation. His strategy: demand detailed information from auto makers on past research efforts and costs, leading them to decline to testify rather than reveal financial and other corporate secrets. Also, some companies feel they may gain competitive edge by meeting standards on their own. Firms have until Sept. 27 to respond.

COERCED COOPERATION BETWEEN EPA and Corps of Engineers in administration of Refuse Act discharge permit program is showing strain. Only 10 days after Maj. Gen. F.P. Koisch, Corps director of civil works, told American Public Works Association meeting in Philadelphia that no citations would be entered against delinquent filers until November or December (A/WFR, Sept. 20, 1971, p.384), EPA called Washington press conference to announce it was asking Justice Department to move against 35 industrial firms for failure to apply for permits. Story below.

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY and Council on Environmental Quality have formed study group to investigate presence of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) in food and other compounds. Some scientists believe PCB even more environmentally dangerous than DDT, to which it has close chemical resemblance. Thousands of tons are used annually as insulating fluids and as means of transferring heat from one mechanism to another, since it can withstand temperatures up to 1,600 degrees F. Alarm was sounded when large amounts were found recently in chickens, eggs, turkeys, salmon, and fish meal. Meeting of Nobel laureates in Goteberg, Sweden, concluded that PCB "concentrations may reach levels sufficient to damage ecosystems irreversibly on a world-wide scale before the damage is recognized." Federal agencies hurriedly studying the threat include EPA, Food and Drug Administration, and Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, and Interior.

According to NSIA, analysis of federal R&D expenditures and the recommending of new civilian R&D programs, as contemplated in Section 101 of HR 34, would be very valuable in identifying programs likely to contribute to the resolution of the nation's more pressing problems, as well as in disclosing gaps in present technological programs which can be filled through the application of technical talent; "but expansion of study effort by federal agencies should not be treated as a principal objective.

"Rather, available federal funding should be devoted to well-thought-out programs aimed at the solution of national problems. After such programs are defined and funded, the industrial organizations charged with carrying out the work will be in a position to recruit experienced people to accomplish the job and provide such retraining as is necessary after employment."

NSIA sees the most effective solution as being the establishment of major programs at the national level under existing agencies dealing with problems of the environment, transportation, urban development, health, safety engineering, pollution, resource utilization, etc. It feels that any attempts to segregate the retraining effort from the on-the-job reorientation of professional engineers and scientists would be both ineffective and unnecessary.

NSIA thus finds it more efficient for the Government to define projects needed to achieve national goals in the civil sector, establish appropriate institutional arrangements as necessary, "and then fund specific programs, using industry capabilities, that will effectively provide opportunities to apply the nation's technical talent to the achievement of these goals."

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PCB RESEARCH: CHEMISTS REPORT PROGRESS BEING MADE IN IMPROVING METHODS OF DETECTING PCB POLLUTANTS

Progress in pinning down PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) pollutants was reported by 12 scientists at a meeting sponsored by the Working Group on Pesticides, a unit of the President's Cabinet Committee on the Environment, according to an announcement issued through Agriculture Department facilities.

The PCB compounds that sometimes contaminate food, water, and livestock feed are yielding to the scientists' persistent research efforts to improve methods of detecting and quantitatively determining traces of the compounds at several government and private laboratories, it was reported.

PCBs are not pesticides but share some of the same characteristics and can be confused with several pesticides in analytical methods. PCBs are found in many commercial products, including printing inks, carbon paper, rubber tires, plasticizers, and industrial cooling systems (heat exchangers). It was explained that they seem to enter the environment from many of these sources and become of particular concern when leakages or recycling (of paper) result in contamination of food and water. Harmful properties of PCBs are not yet completely known, it was noted, but are under intensive toxicological study in a number of laboratories.

Several months ago, PCB contamination resulted in the destruction of a large number of broiler chickens after they ate feed into which PCB had leaked at a North Carolina plant. During the past six weeks, 50,000 Minnesota turkeys slaughtered for Thanksgiving have been impounded by government inspectors at Swift Dairy & Poultry Company in Detroit Lakes, Minn., a subsidiary of Swift & Company, the nation's largest meat packer. USDA officials said Swift voluntarily kept the suspected turkeys from the market after "a number" of the 50,000 birds showed PCB residues larger than the five parts per million allowed by the Food and Drug Administration.

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In giving their PCB research progress reports, the scientists said that PCBs represent a challenge to chemists far more difficult than the analogy of separating salt and sugar that had been mixed together. They explained that PCBs have characteristics that resemble persistent insecticides in some regards, and both groups of compounds may interfere with each other if appropriate precautions are not followed.

One chemist from the Environmental Protection Agency laboratory in Athens, Ga., noted that various forms, or isomers, of PCABs can be detected. A Standard University chemist reported that more than 20 such isomers were detected in liver samples from sea otters.

A simple method has been developed to distinguish PCB from toxaphene, which interfered in the analyses and invalidated tests, according to a USDA chemist at Beltsville, Md. Another researcher at Beltsville developed a process by which natural constituents of eggs that also invalidated tests can be removed.

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WATER POLLUTION: HOUSE UNIT CONCLUDES HEARINGS, WILL START DRAFTING WATER CONTROL BILL IN OCTOBER

After hearing a plea from Rep. Henry S. Reuss (D-Wis) for continued implementation of the Refuse Act of 1899, the House Public Works Committee on Friday concluded five months of hearings on water pollution control, and announced plans to begin drafting a bill in the first week of October.

Committee Chairman John A. Blatnik (D-Minn) has announced his intention to have the unit scrap the Refuse law and replace it with a stronger statute that is "administratively workable--which the 1899 Act is not."

In addition, Russell E. Train, chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, last week urged the House panel to approve a comprehensive bill on water quality integrating the Refuse Act with the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. (DER No. 180, A-7)

Rep. Reuss, however, has declared that such action would transform "a simple, easily enforceable, one-paragraph anti-pollution law into a lengthy, cumbersome, and fragmented law of dubious value."

He pointed out that the Refuse Act states that no one may discharge or deposit his polluting wastes into a navigable waterway or its tributaries without a permit from the Corps of Engineers, and recommended that this permit system not be impaired in any new legislation.

He also warned that a recommendation from the National Association of Manufacturers to amend the Refuse Act "so as to limit it to consideration of anchorage and navigation" would remove "an effective tool for citizen participation" and would result in "gutting" the Act as an anti-pollution tool.

Rep. Reuss, who is chairman of the House Government Operations Subcommittee on Conservation and Natural Resources, warned that the NAM recommendation would result in abandoning the "no pollution discharge" standard of the 1899 law, and that "the old assimilative capacity theory under which our waters are simply private sewers of the polluters would then continue to reign supreme."

Public Works Committee Counsel Richard J. Sullivan estimated the House panel would meet in executive sessions for at least a week and perhaps longer to draft the new water pollution control measure, and said it is too early to indicate what position the committee will take.