

THE SUN

BALTIMORE, MD.

(MORNING)

D. 183,549 SUN. 351,849

DEC 20 1975 *BJK*

Dawdling on Toxic Chemicals

Never have the arguments been stronger for a strong national toxic substances control act. The evidence that a growing number of chemicals increasingly threatens humans, animals and plants—and even entire ecosystems—has burgeoned during the past two years. Among the chemicals: the ubiquitous polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) that are persistent, poisonous industrial compounds found in growing quantities in the environment; the polyvinyl chlorides that cause human liver cancer; the lead from auto exhausts which more than likely poisons inner-city children.

The stronger versions of toxic substances control bills now being considered by Congress would give the Environmental Protection Agency authority to require toxicological screening, and; if indicated, extensive testing, of all commercial chemicals, both those already on the market and those proposed for marketing. Although EPA now has substantial powers to prevent pollution of the air and water with chemicals, these powers leave some substances vir-

tually untouched. EPA has plans to prevent PCB discharges by major industries, but these deadly chemicals enter the environment from many other sources—ranging from discarded old electrical equipment in junkyards to smoldering trash heaps. The only way EPA can get a handle on the problem is through strong legislation giving it the authority to restrict the manufacture or importation of toxic substances.

Despite all the new evidence, however, Congress has dawdled on toxic substances control legislation. This appears to be a result of a misguided reluctance to impose any additional regulation on industries suffering from the recession. This reluctance has bottled up a strong Senate bill in committee, and threatens to cow the House into incorporating weakening amendments from an industry bill. The justification for quick action is overwhelming in view of all the new evidence that industry has not been able to police itself with regard to chemicals that represent tremendous threats to the public health.