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U.S. bans chemical PCB

EPA sets last sales for 1979

By Casey Bukro
Environment editor

A NATIONAL ban on the sale of the industrial chemical PCB was announced Tuesday by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

To begin on July 1, 1978, it will be the first general ban in the U.S. on an industrial chemical considered harmful to the environment and to public health, according to Karl Bremer, the EPA's regional toxic substances coordinator. The EPA's list of outlawed chemicals contains only a few pesticides, including DDT.

PCB – polychlorinated biphenyl – is a chemical relative of DDT. Both are long-lasting chemical poisons that accumulate in the environment and in human tissue.

A SCHEDULE for phasing out the production and use of PCB in the U. S. was outlined at an EPA hearing Tuesday in the Pick-Congress Hotel.

"PCB will be banned," Bremer said. "They are considered a health hazard. They tend to accumulate in human tissue, and they're suspected of causing cancer."

Industrial spokesmen were called to the hearing to voice any opposition to the ban or to suggest how the ban's impact can be softened.

E.M. Warner, of the Joy Manufacturing Co. of Franklin, Pa., a major manufacturer of mining equipment, said the ban could hinder coal mining because of the extensive use of PCB-cooled engines in mining machines. He asked for a three-year delay.

HARRY ONISHI, a spokesman for the Edison Electric Institute in New York, said the electric-utility industry has long expected the crackdown on PCB and already has begun phasing out its use.

"We recognize that they are persistent in nature and care has to be taken in their disposal," said Onishi, adding the greatest impact will fall on electrical hardware manufacturers who use PCB as coolants.

PCB has been widely used since the 1930s as a coolant and in hydraulic fluid, paints, inks, plastics, lubricants, and preservatives.

ITS HEALTH hazards were discovered in the early 1970s and is implicated in cancer, birth defects, and nervous disorders. Japan and France have banned the chemical.

Monsanto Corp., the sole PCB manufacturer in the U.S., has volunteered to phase out its production.

Vaidas Adomkus, EPA deputy regional director, said he does not expect much opposition to the PCB ban because "we have sufficient information to prove the harmful effects of using PCB. I don't think industry is resisting because they recognize the damaging effects."

The EPA is acting under authority of the federal Toxic Substances Control Act to phase out the use of PCB.

THE TIMETABLE calls for PCB disposal regulations to be developed this month. PCB production is to end by January, 1979 and sales are to end by July, 197.

EPA OFFICIALS said it would be an economic hardship to call an immediate halt to PCB use while manufacturers still have PCB products on their shelves, and some time is needed to develop PCB substitutes.

A PCB conference held in Chicago in 1975 recommended phasing out its use because there is no known method of treating or removing it once it gets into the environment.

In a related move, the Food and Drug Administration is considering lowering allowable limits of PCB in fish from 5 parts per million (ppm) to 2 ppm. Illinois commercial fishermen have said that would destroy commercial fishing in the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan.

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