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NORTHEAST PA. METROPOLITAN AREA

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EPA dispute merits a thorough airing

The Environmental Protection Agency, established to clean up the nation's air, water and other resources should first heal itself forthwith of current internal bureaucratic ailments.

Until it does, EPA forfeits whatever credibility it has earned as the nation's environmental watchdog.

Needed is a thorough airing of the conditions within the EPA under the leadership of Ann Gorsuch Burford and Rita M. Lavelle, one of Burford's deputies, who was fired February 7.

What is not needed, however, is a stampede of Congressional committees. Many of the panels are properly involved, others are obviously intent on sharing the spotlight in the mushrooming controversy.

Notwithstanding the political differences, there appears to be enough smoke issuing from the EPA to warrant a full-scale probe to determine the source.

Typical of the cases at issue is the polluting of Lake Michigan at Waukegan, Ill., with up to 1.7 million pounds of PCBs.

The agency said Outboard Marine, the nation's largest out-

board motor manufacturer, used PCBs from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Monsanto was a supplier of the fluid, which is suspected of causing cancer.

Ms. Lavelle conducted the negotiations with Outboard and Monsanto. EDF officials now acknowledge the talks under investigation by the Justice Department to determine if any criminal activity was involved.

Also in need of an airing is the management of the EPA's \$180.7 million "superfund," which is collected from chemical and other companies for use in cleaning hazardous waste sites.

Over the weekend, it was disclosed that an audit of the fund had been unable to show that \$53.6 million had been expended for its intended purposes.

The foregoing, plus the reports of missing tapes, shredded documents and other clandestine activities, stir chilling recollections of the 1970s Watergate trauma. In the EPA case, the only acceptable treatment is an objective, thorough airing of all the circumstances.

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