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EPA Ban to Be Costly for Coal

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — A ban on a carcinogenic lubricant widely used in mining machinery and electrical transformers could cost the coal and power industries nearly $50 million, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA ban — which goes into effect in February — will forbid the use of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), which has been used as a lubricant in mining equipment for some 60 years. The viscous fluid was used widely because it has a very high heat tolerance needed for use in the coal industry.

According to Robin Woods of the EPA's public information office, the ban will carry fines of up to $25,000 a day for noncompliance under the Toxic Substance Control Act. EPA officials said they expect the Mining Safety and Health Administration to assist with enforcement.

EPA officials said they discovered as early as 1972 that the substance was found to cause cancer and nerve damage in laboratory animals. In addition, there is no effective way to dispose of the substance.

The federal agency said it estimates that since Monsanto Co. first produced PCB in the early 1920s, more than 1.25 billion pounds of the toxic substance has been used by industry. At least 750 million pounds is still in use, and six million pounds has been incinerated, the only effective means of disposal. The rest has been dispersed into the environment.

"It's shown up everywhere from ice in the Arctic to mothers' milk in a dozen states," Ms. Wood said. "Industries used to dump old PCB in the wsterways and it was dispersed in the air. It also made its way into the food chain. There's just no way to get rid of it."

PCB, which has been sold under the names Askarel and Pyronal, must be totally out of use in mining machinery by 1981 under proposed revisions in the law. Presently, coal companies are required to store the fluid in specially constructed drums. There are two disposal stations in the country — in Houston, Tex., and Bridgeport, N.J. Neither has been approved by the EPA.

Electrical transformers containing the substance may remain in use until they wear out, said EPA environmental engineer Hal Snyder. "They can stay up as long as they don't require maintenance because they are safe containers as long as people aren't working on them. We're trying to avoid premature retirement of equipment when possible."

He said several West Virginia based mining companies have already begun converting to other types of lubricants, such as mineral or silicone oils.

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Halting PCB Use May Hike Coal Cost

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (UPI) — Consumers will probably end up paying the $3 million it's going to cost the coal industry to halt use of a cancer-causing lubricant widely used in mining machinery, according to industry spokesmen.

The ban on polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) goes into effect in February.

The Environmental Protection Agency says the coal and power industries combined will probably have to spend $40 million to convert to new materials. PCB, which has been found to cause cancer and nerve damage in animals, is scheduled to be totally out of use in mining machinery by 1981.

Fines of up to $25,000 a day will be leveled at violators, according to EPA spokeswoman Robin Wood, with the Mining Safety and Health Administration expected to assist in enforcement.

"We use PCB extensively in both surface and deep mining," said Herk Hamm of Consolidated Coal Co. "We're looking at all ways we can meet this problem."

"I say the coal industry will have to acquiesce pretty hard to fit the new regulations," said Charles Jones, part owner of Amherst Coal Co.

"The problem is going to be getting the public to pay for them," he added. "How much more expense from complying with new laws can we absorb?"

The EPA estimates more than 1.25 billion pounds of the toxic chemical have been used by industry since Monsanto Co. first produced it in the early 1920s. Of that total, at least 750 million pounds are still in use, six million pounds have been incinerated and the rest has been dispersed in the environment.

"It's shown up everywhere from ice in the Arctic to mother's milk in a dozen states," Ms. Wood said. "Industries used to dump old PCB in the waterways and it was dispersed in the air. It also made its way into the food chain.

"There's just no way to get rid of it."