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Synthetic fiber markets held up well in June, ordinarily a slow month for fibers, according to the latest data from the Textile Economics Bureau. Total man-made fiber shipments for the month remained at the level for May, while fiber inventories continued to decline. Stocks are now 3.5% lower than May levels and down 47% from their peak last December. Shipments for June were only 11% below the year-earlier level, compared with a 31% decline for May.

Allied Chemical will grow synthetic crystals for laser and electronics applications in a new plant in Charlotte, N.C. An industry source valued the project at more than \$7 million. Major products of its first phase, due for completion in March, will be magnetic garnet film for magnetic bubble memories and epitaxial silicon films on sapphire for use in semiconductors. Allied has been making small quantities of both films for about three years and now is going into commercial-scale development.

Mobay is offering a 5-gal polycarbonate bottle for the bottled water market, following the lead by General Electric. Bottles made of Mobay's Merlon polycarbonate are being marketed on the West Coast. GE announced last month that its Lexan resin is being introduced in milk bottles, baby bottles, and water bottles throughout the U.S. Both producers stress polycarbonate's lighter weight—the GE bottle weighs a tenth of what a glass bottle would—and unbreakability as advantages over glass. Advantages over plastics include transparency, heat resistance so that the bottles can be sterilized, and lack of contamination of the taste or odor of the water.

Construction activity in the second quarter rose 29% over the first quarter—the first quarterly increase since the end of 1973 and another indication that the economy is beginning to recover from the recession, according to F. W. Dodge's construction index. The index slipped 4% from May to June because of a drop in utilities construction that had been exceptionally strong in April and May. But the June index is still 5% above its level in June 1974.

Government

Legislation to set up a White House science adviser's office is being firmed up by the House Science & Technology Committee. Rep. Olin E. Teague (D.-Tex.) and Rep. Charles A. Mosher (R.-Ohio), the chairman and ranking Republican on the committee, have jointly introduced a bill that probably will be quite close to what the committee eventually votes on. The bill's major provisions include a statement of a national science policy, an Office of Science & Technology Policy whose director and up to four assistant directors are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, and a 15-month study of the federal science apparatus.

The U.S. should not abandon its breeder reactor R&D program and should go ahead with plans to build a breeder demonstration plant, says the General Accounting Office in a 149-page report released late last week. That, in effect, is the same decision already reached by the Energy Research & Development Administration. Development should continue, GAO says, because of uncertainties over future energy demand and U.S. willingness to conserve energy. The agency adds that a firm decision on commercializing the breeder is seven to 10 years off, and during that time many of the breeder's safety, safeguard, and environmental problems are expected to be reduced or eliminated.

Birth defects cannot be correlated with vinyl chloride exposure, at least in Painesville, Ohio, the Center for Disease Control has found. Last March the Ohio Department of Health reported a significantly increased rate of birth defects in three communities having polyvinyl chloride polymerization plants. But a followup study of the parents of the 14 affected children showed that none of the parents had ever worked at the polymerization plants or lived within 2 miles of them. And a study of a similar community in Pennsylvania showed no increases in the rate of birth defects.

Conferees dropped the Bauman amendment from the NSF authorization bill, approving a \$791 million budget for the agency for fiscal year 1976. The Ford Administration had sought \$775.4 million. The bill authorizes \$377.6 million for research project support, about \$3 million less than NSF asked for. And the compromise bill would have NSF spend 7.5% of its research applied to national needs program budget, which totals about \$65 million, for work performed by small R&D firms.

International

Opposition to Dow Chemical's entry into Japanese chlorine-caustic soda production, sparked by the Japan Soda Industry Association, has spread to the Hokkaido prefectural government. The prefecture's assembly has passed a resolution urging Japanese government refusal of Dow's proposal to put a 1000 metric-ton-a-year (of chlorine) plant on stream by the early 1980's (C&EN, July 28, page 5). A prime prospective site is Tomakomai, a Hokkaido coastal district reserved for development into one of Japan's largest industrial complexes.

Du Pont plans a major expansion of its Mexican operation, chairman Irving S. Shapiro announced last week. The company's present investment of more than \$200 million in Mexico will be increased at least 25% during the next few years, he says, although the specific areas for this investment are not being disclosed. Du Pont has had facilities in Mexico for 50 years and currently manufactures a wide range of products there, including textile fibers, agricultural chemicals, and plastics.