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# CARI Warned Of Costs of A Ban on PCB

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ARLINGTON, VA. — The mechanical contracting industry may have to contend with higher electrical components costs if the Federal Government imposes a ban on the use of toxic PCB in electrical equipment.

Several types of PCB — polychlorinated biphenyl — are used as insulating media in capacitors and transformers and are highly valued for their dielectric, nonflammable properties.

However, environmentalists fear that PCB's toxicity and its very slow decay (chemical breakdown) characteristics make it a dangerous substance when it is discarded and is absorbed into nature's food chain.

New York State is prohibiting commercial fishing in the Hudson River this year because of dangerously high levels of PCB in fish resulting from small but measurable amounts of waste PCB being discharged into the river by a major electrical manufacturer upstream.

### Expensive to Switch

If a prohibition on the use of PCB is imposed, the electrical equipment industry — and its direct and indirect customers — would be faced with additional expenditures of $500 million annually to cover research, de-

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# Ban

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velopment and production costs of an alternative insulating medium and equipment that could use it, according to some estimates.

The March 31 meeting here of Council of the Air-Conditioning & Refrigeration Industry was briefed

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on the PCB situation by lobbyist Wilbur G. Sparks, director of legislative affairs for the Air-Conditioning & Refrigeration Institute, and Herbert T. Gilkey, ARI director of government and consumer affairs.

Sparks said the Ford Administration appears to be stepping up its efforts to have Congress pass the Toxic Substances Control Act (S. 776), which would strengthen Environmental Protection Agency authority over substances such as PCB.

### Guilty from Start

According to Gilkey, the bill authorizes EPA to ban PCB, for example, unless there is conclusive evidence that the substance is not harmful. In other words, he

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explained, a questionable substance is considered guilty until proven innocent.

Even so, EPA already has broad authority to clamp down on the use of questionable substances, the ARI representatives said.

Moreover, they said, similar bans and controls are being developed by a number of state governments.

Monsanto Co., the only U.S. producer of PCB, has said it would phase out PCB production in accordance with any federal ban, and General Electric Co., a major user, has said it would comply with such a ban, too, but only if an alternative insulating fluid with comparable fire-resistant properties can be developed.

### EIA Campaign

But the Electronic Industries Association, backed up by ARI and other industry organizations, is lobbying against government constraints.

According to Sparks and Gilkey, EIA is arguing that new, reduced toxicity levels have been achieved in some types of PCB, making them less hazardous in the food chain.

Another EIA argument contends that no single standard can be applied to PCB because there are some 200 variations of the chemical, all having their own toxicological and biodegradation characteristics.

EIA is also pointing to new, strict controls throughout the country on the discharge of wastes into the environment as a reason why a PCB ban may no longer be necessary to protect the ecological food chain; less and less PCB and other dangerous wastes are being indiscriminately discharged into the environment.

EIA's strongest argument is PCB's fire resistance under high-temperature conditions. An exploding transformer is less likely to be accompanied by a shower of hot, flaming insulating liquid if the liquid is PCB rather than another type of oil-based fluid.

Sparks and Gilkey suggested that all elements of all potentially affected industries concern themselves with the PCB controversy