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House Tightens Rules on PCB

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Environmental protection and worker safety were the top orders of business in the House Tuesday.

The House unanimously approved and sent to the governor a bill severely limiting the manufacture, sale and use in Michigan of the toxic chemical PCB.

It also passed 38-41 and sent to the Senate a bill requiring an extra worker above ground when another worker enters a manhole.

The Senate did routine work on its calendar but took no major action.

The PCB bill, sponsored by Rep. David Boniorn D-Mount Clemens, reduces over a three-year period the concentration of PCB — polychlorinated biphenyl — which an item in Michigan could contain.

PCB has been linked with the deaths and reproductive failures of many Michigan fish and fish-eating birds and animals. High concentrations have been found in almost all Great Lakes fish tested.

The bill states that, starting in July, no item could contain more than 250,000 parts per million (ppm) pf PCBs. That amount is reduced to 1,000 ppm next January and 100 ppm a year later.

The director of the Department of Natural Resources could make those limits lower.

Also beginning in July, people could not manufacture or sell an item containing more than 100 ppm unless the item is labeled to disclose the concentration level.

PCB or an item containing PCB could be sold or used in Michigan if it were contained in a closed system like a transistor or capacitor.

The manhole measure prohibits a person from entering or staying in a manhole that's on a public right of way unless there is a second employe above ground to guarantee prompt action in case of an emergency. The second employe would be trained in safety and first aid.

The House amended the bill so that one employe could enter a manhole alone for no more than 15 minutes for housekeeping, inspections, or taking readings. But that worker would have to be were trained in safety practices.

Legislative analysts estimate the bill would cost utilities alone as much as $10 million.

The bill was introduced by Sen. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth. It returns to the Senate for concurrence in the House amendment.

Supporters of the bill said that people who work alone underground in manholes have very little chance of escaping unharmed if an accident occurs.

Opponents argued, however, that the measure is a feather-bedding bill — designed simply to create more jobs and keep labor happy.

"The opponents to this bill believe no one should ever place a dollar value below the value of a human life," charged Rep. Daisy Elliott, D-Detroit.

But Rep. Gerrit. Hasper, D-Muskegon, urged other legislators to oppose the bill on grounds that it was simply a sop to labor. "I ask, plead, beg that we shall have the guts to shake our chains and vote no on this lousy bill," he said.

The House and Senate reconvene today at 2 p.m.

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