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Furnaces may end PCB woes

WASHINGTON (AP) The Environmental Protection Agency reported Tuesday it had approved operation of high-temperature incinerators in Deer Park, Texas, and El Dorado, Ark., after tests showed both were capable of destroying more than 99.99 percent of the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) found in waste oils.

Government approval for the incinerators designed to destroy PCBs should finally break the logjam that has blocked efforts to get rid of the highly toxic chemicals, EPA officials aid.

PCBs for years were used as insulators in electric transformers and other electrical equipment. The manufacture and many uses of the chemical were banned by Congress in 1976.

However, disposal of millions of pounds of PCB wastes were held up while the EPA conducted tests on incinerators.

Agency officials said Tuesday that EPA approval of the first of these incinerators "represents a major step forward in dealing with one of the nation's lengthiest and most severe environmental headaches."

The Texas incinerator, built by Rollins Environmental Services, and the Arkansas unit, owned by Energy Systems Co., could begin operating in March, the officials said.

About 20 million pounds of PCB waste oils, from equipment taken out of service, have been in storage since 1978 waiting for approved incinerators to be built.

PCBs, manufactured since 1929, have been shown to cause cancer, reproductive failures, gastric disorders, skin lesions and other serious ailments in laboratory animals.

EPA officials said that a person exposed to the maximum level of emissions from the approved incinerators over a period of 70 years would have a one-in-2.5-million chance of increased cancer.