JAN 30 1976

Hazardous chemicals adminstration target

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Ford administration is asking Congress for legislation to shore up spotty federal authority to cope with such hazardous chemical substances as polychlorinated biphenvis — PCBs.

Environmental Protection Agency chief Russell Train and Nathaniel Reed, assistant interior secretary for Fish and Wildlife, told a House subcommittee that PCBs pose a significant threat to health.

The stable, fire-resistant chemicals, now used mainly as insulating fluids in electrical equipment like high-power transformers, have been shown to cause reproductive failures, gastric disorders and skin lesions in mammals.

Calling PCBs a "suspected carcinogen" — though their cancer-causing effects in humans have not been proven — and a "significant hazard" to health, Train last month announced a major EPA effort to have them removed from the environment.

He told a House environmental panel Wednesday that the PCB problem is only part of a bigger, more dismaying picture. He said potentially harmful chemical compounds enter the market at a rate of 1,000 a year. He urged that legislation be enacted to give the government power to monitor and test all chemicals proposed for industrial or consumer use.

Reed said exceedingly high levels of PCBs have been found in all major U.S. river and coastal systems and in much of the nation's soil. He said the compound harms the growth and reproduction of some species of fish and wildlife.

PCBs have also been detected in milk, eggs and poultry from livestock exposed to grains contaminated with the chemicals, EPA officials claim.

"PCBs are literally everywhere," said Reed.

Train said an estimated 700 million tons of the virtually indestructable chemicals have been produced in this country since 1929.

Little can be done about PCBs dischraged into the environment over the years, he said, adding that the EPA is working to prevent the escape of about 300 tons of PCBs estimated to be still in use.

William Papageorge, representing Monsanto Industrial Chemicals, the nation's only remaining producer of PCB, said the company has voluntarily reduced production by half and will stop altogether when suitable substitutes are developed.

"Monsanto has no desire to remain in the PCB manufacturing business any longer than necessary," he said.

On Dec. 22, EPA announced that its 10 regional offices had been directed, under the Clean Water Act of 1972, to establish guidelines that would virtually prohibit any PCBs in processed wastes from Monsanto or any user of the chemical.