

PCBS

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Environmentalists, Utilities Assail Rules To Cut PCBs

WASHINGTON (AP) — Both environmentalists and the utilities industry are unhappy with new government rules that will require the replacement of approximately 1.5 million pieces of electrical equipment over the next six years.

The rules were issued Tuesday by the Environmental Protection Agency. They are aimed at reducing the hazards of contamination from leaking transformers and capacitors containing toxic PCBs as an insulator.

Environmentalists said the requirements stop short of what's needed; industry officials said the requirements call on them to replace too much equipment too quickly.

For decades, polychlorinated biphenyls were used as an insulator in large electric equipment. But Congress became concerned by growing PCB contamination of waterways and by studies linking the chemical to cancer; in 1979, it banned all manufacture. The EPA was directed to regulate equipment already manufactured.

In 1980, a federal court overturned the agency's first rule after environmentalists attacked it for allowing 50 percent of PCB equipment to remain in use.

In the new rule, the EPA will ban after Oct. 1, 1985, the use of electric capacitors containing PCBs in areas where the public could be exposed. Industry officials said this definition would cover about half of the 2.5 million PCB capacitors in use.

The agency will also ban, after Oct. 1, 1985, the use of transformers and electromagnets containing PCBs in areas where there is danger of contaminating food

or animal feed. Plant owners are required to make weekly inspections for leaks until they replace the equipment. The EPA estimated that 3,000 transformers would have to be replaced.

Tom Dehmer, a spokesman for Union Electric Co., said UE would have to replace about 23,000 capacitors in Missouri, Illinois and Iowa under the new EPA ruling. He said 11,000 other capacitors with the PCB insulation would not have to be replaced because they are in substations and power plants where they are not exposed to the public.

Cost of breaking down these capacitors, and then transporting them and either recycling or destroying them would amount to about \$30 million, Dehmer said.

He said the utility could meet the deadline set by the federal agency but it would be difficult to do so.

PCB contamination in 1979 from a leaking transformer at a slaughter plant in Billings, Mont., contaminated ground and animal feed distributed in 10 states before the leak was discovered.

"They are backing away from the concept of a reasonable phase-out and allowing this equipment to be used for its useful life, however long that might be. That is no regulation at all," said Ellen Silbergeld, a scientist with the Environmental Defense Fund.

But Corry Trench, a scientist with the Edison Electric Institute, said his organization was concerned that six years was too short a time to replace all the capacitors being banned. He said his organization, which represents electric utilities, may sue over that requirement.