BUYERS NEWS

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Cap Chemical Danger

NEW YORK -- New York State officials have warned that PCB, (polychlorinated biphenyls), a chemical used in large-sized capacitors, has reached dangerously high levels in fish recently sampled. Federal and state researchers determined that striped bass from the Hudson River and salmon from Lake Ontario were the most affected species.

Ogden R. Reid, New York State Environmental Conservation Commissioner, indicated that discharges into the river from General Electric installations at Fort Edward, about 50 miles north of Albany, have contributed to the PCB problem and that other companies are also involved.

PCB is produced in this country by Monsanto. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Washington has indicated it is considering standards for toxic pollutant effluent discharges

Chemical (Cont.)

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from PCB, which would certainly affect costs and production of capacitors and transformers (EBN, Aug. 4).

A spokesman for Sprague Electric Co., a large capacitor producer, explained that the chemical is used only in ac capacitors, and cited capacitors in cooling equipment and motors as examples.

While PCB has many uses and is produced in many countries, the electronics industry uses only one type called 1016, produced solely by Monsanto. This 1016 substance was developed for use about five years ago. It replaced a type designated 1242, which contained about 9% more of the non-biodegradable chlorinates.

The PCB currently used in the electronics field is far more biodegradable than PCBs used in other industries. In addition, domestic large-capacitor manufacturers have made definite efforts to minimize effects.

In 1972, a GE plant was discharging about 48 pounds of type 1016 PCB into the environment. Their current discharge level is down to two pounds per day.

Dr. Edward L. Simons, manager of environmental protection for the GE corporate staff, told EBN, "Basically, there are two things which have been done. We have changed the material being discharged, and we have lowered the number of pounds per day."

Studies undertaken in the U.S. have not as yet found an alternative substance that possesses the characteristic of non-inflammability of PCB 1016. Because the substance is virtually non-flammable, it is vital for high-voltage operations in non-industrial areas.