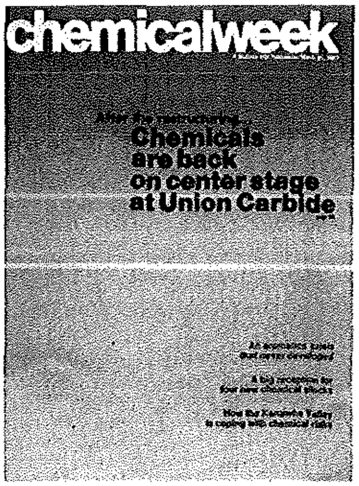

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Chemicals are back on center stage at Carbide

In the wake of Union Carbide's massive restructuring, the Chemicals and Plastics Group, with operating income of $472 million in 1986, emerged at the core of the corporation. "Boy, is that different from being a stepchild," says H. William Lichtenberger, the group's president. Despite the rush by many chemical producers into specialties, Carbide still expects big things of the 63% of the Chemicals and Plastics portfolio made up of commodities. But Lichtenberger's strategy also stresses new business probes, which could lead to joint ventures.

cover: Chemical Week Art Dept.

comment

other features

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been dispelled, since even smaller chemical-producing countries, where governments will have to bear a larger part of the testing burden, have backed the issue.

The first steps toward a cooperative effort will be taken in September, at a meeting to be held in Ottawa. There, OECD members will compare existing chemical testing programs and begin to identify possible cooperative activities.

Much in evidence at the Paris meeting were the political reverberations from incidents last November, when substances from chemical industry sites caused extensive pollution of the Rhine River. Pressed by the governments of West Germany, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands—the Rhine-bordering countries where the pollution had the greatest impact in terms of damage to property and public opinion—OECD also agreed to set up a special high-priority program on chemical accidents.

Guidelines. That program will develop guidelines to prevent major releases of hazardous substances into the environment, identify priority chemicals and processes that should be the focus of international cooperative efforts, and arrange for exchange of information previously gained by government and industry in dealing with accidents. EPA's Thomas says the program will allow OECD to identify a list of international experts any member nation could call upon in the event of an accident.

A high-level OECD meeting on hazardous releases is set for early 1988, and additional funding will be made available for the group to carry out the work, reflecting the "urgency we all attach to this new initiative," says Ed Nijpels, Dutch Minister for Housing, Physical Planning and Environment. □

DAVID HUNTER in Paris, with Paula M. Block

EPA is under fire over PCB dumping

There is a new scandal brewing in Washington. It involves the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) handling of information that scores of unlined earthen pits along 270,000 miles of interstate natural gas pipelines are contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

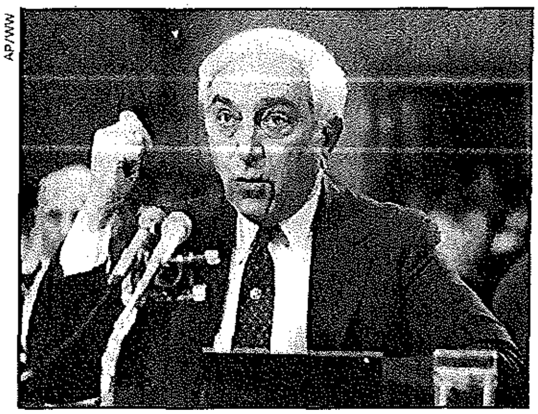
Task force. First reports of the contamination appeared in mid-February, when newspapers reported that Texas Eastern Gas Pipeline (Houston), which operates a 9,635-mile pipeline system through 16 states from Texas to New York City, had dumped PCB-contaminated liquids at 62 sites in 13 states. On Feb. 25, EPA assembled a task force to review PCB problems along all U.S. pipeline systems, and by Mar. 11, the agency had identified five more interstate pipeline companies that admitted to similar dumping of PCBs.

At a March 17 hearing on the subject, Senator Frank Lautenberg (D., N.J.), charged that EPA had been dragging its feet about notifying the public of the problems that the pipleline companies had run into. Lautenberg, chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works subcommittee on Superfund and environmental oversight said at the hearing that "EPA knew PCB dumping was going on for some time, and the agency did nothing to inform the public." He says that EPA was aware of the Texas Eastern contamination since at least August 1985 but did little about it. Said Lautenberg: "We see EPA asleep at the wheel and in disarray."

'Judgment call.' The agency's decision not to alert the public "perhaps was wrong," concedes Thomas L. Adams, Jr., EPA assistant administrator in the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Monitoring, and he concedes that EPA should have moved more quickly. At the same time, he defends the agency's actions as a "judgment call" that was based on lack of hard information that the pits posed a danger to human health.

The data EPA needed to assess the situation, says Adams, did not come until last December when Roy F. Weston (West Chester, Pa.), a Texas Eastern contractor, finished testing samples in 10 contaminated pits. Weston's preliminary report shows that maximum concentrations of PCBs at 8 of the 10 sites ranged from 130 parts per million (ppm) to 10,000 ppm. Regulations under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) require that liquids containing more than 50 ppm PCBs be disposed of only at facilities with permits under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA).

For its part, Texas Eastern admits dumping the PCB-contaminated liquid, says Howard C. Homeyer, the company's president. He explains that in 1972, Texas Eastern signed a consent agreement with EPA requiring clean up of the system with the PCB-contaminated liquid, which was contained in lubricating oil used by the company since 1958 at compressor stations along the pipeline. But Homeyer also says that Texas Eastern continued dumping contaminated liquids into pits until 1975, when it


AP/WW

Lautenberg: "We see EPA asleep at the wheel."

began to install diffuser systems to replace the earthen pits. And the company continued to use PCBs in its pipeline system until 1977, although Monsanto, in 1972, advised that it would no longer sell PCBs because of their threat to human health and the environment.

Since 1972, says Homeyer, the company has spent $20 million to remove PCB contamination from its pipeline system. At the Mar. 17 hearing, Homeyer testified that Texas Eastern is committed to cleaning up the pipeline system even further and will excavate contaminated soils until PCB contamination is reduced to acceptable levels.

Adams said that EPA is negotiating with Texas Eastern to clean up all contaminated sites under the authority of TSCA, the Superfund law and RCRA. The agency is continuing its investigations of the five other pipeline companies that had admitted similar dumping. But the problem may not end even if all those companies are brought into compliance. For Adams says that he "cannot rule out the possibility" that similar dumping may have taken place along the nation's 1-million-mile network of intrastate pipelines, as well. □

CONRAD MacKERRON in Washington, with Laurie A. Rich

Upjohn offers hope for those balding blues

Some hair-raising news for U.S. baldies last week could spell profit-raising news for Upjohn. An advisory committee to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) unanimously recommended approval of Upjohn's minoxidil preparation to treat male pattern baldness. Despite some caveats from the five-member panel of outside specialists, FDA is expected to approve the externally applied lotion—brandnamed Ro-