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PCBs

EPA Suggests Industry Be Chief Monitor of PCBs

By Sandra Sugarman
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The Environmental Protection Agency yesterday proposed that [redacted] monitor their own discharges of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) [redacted]

[redacted] Under the rule proposed yesterday, [redacted]

[redacted]

But Jackie Warren, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, "It [the proposal] leans heavily on voluntary compliance, which hasn't seemed to work that well."

Jeff Vam, a spokesman for the Chemical Manufacturers Association, said CMA is waiting for more details on the plan "before making any judgments."

PCBs are thought by some scientists to be carcinogenic in humans, although the chemical and electrical industries have recently argued that PCBs do not pose a health hazard. In 1976, Congress directed EPA to ban the use or manufacture of PCBs in any form that might significantly expose humans or the environment.

PCBs have not been produced for sale for those years, but they are still produced inadvertently as a byproduct in some industries, including those making organic chemicals and pigments and dyes. PCBs can also still be found in most major electrical equipment.

[redacted]

It would be up to firms to decide if they qualify for either category and to keep records that EPA can inspect to document their claim. Warren was skeptical that many EPA inspectors would be in the field scrutinizing company records, "given EPA's enforcement record these days."

EPA is drawing up guidelines detailing how firms can qualify for exemptions, and is developing a list of industries that probably would qualify for an exemption. But beyond these efforts, the agency has not developed any sort of inspection structure or enforcement strategy.

Firms that are not on the exempted list would have to determine whether their processes are releasing PCBs into the environment, and how much. EPA has specified the test that will be used.

However, under the proposal, manufacturers would not have to actually monitor their pollutants. They can, instead, conduct "theoretical assessments" of their processes to figure out the expected level of PCB releases.

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Washington outlook

THE WHITE HOUSE CLEANS UP ITS ENVIRONMENT ACT

With opinion polls continuing to show strong public support for cleaning up the environment, the Reagan Administration's hard-line stance on environmental issues is not playing well politically. Its plan for renewing major environmental laws is in deep trouble in Congress, and its tough environmental image is causing skittishness among Republicans facing election this fall.

In response, the Administration is pushing an extensive public-relations campaign to show that its environmental policies are, in fact, moderate and to defuse criticisms of Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Anne M. Gorsuch and Interior Secretary James G. Watt, the chief targets of the environmentalists. But while the Administration is changing the tone of its rhetoric, it has not moved to change its basic environmental policies. Its PR approach could wind up being little more than political damage control.

The Administration's problem goes beyond the public's apparent insistence on vigorous environmental cleanup at the same time it calls for less government. The White House must also cope with the lobbying muscle of environmental and conservation groups that have gained new financial strength and with the fact that key congressional leaders on environmental issues, even among Republicans in the Senate, are moderates when it comes to environmental legislation.

It appears increasingly unlikely that either the Administration or its allies in industry will prevail in winning significant revisions this year in any of the major environmental laws up for consideration—the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, or the Resource Conservation & Recovery Act.

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