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EPA CAN TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION ON PCBs ONLY IF DATA SHOWS IMMINENT HAZARD

The Environmental Protection Agency can take immediate action to halt discharges of polychlorinated biphenyls from manufacturing concerns into the nation's waterways only if "data exist or can be developed to establish that an 'imminent and substantial endangerment to the health of persons or to the welfare of persons' is caused by the discharge," according to EPA's Dr. Andrew W. Breidenbach, Acting Assistant Administrator for Water and Hazardous Materials.

Assistant Secretary for Health Theodore Cooper had written to EPA Administrator Russell Train urging him to immediately halt discharges of PCBs into the Hudson River (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Sept. 15, Page 2), following findings of fish with PCBs.

Responding to the Cooper letter, Breidenbach noted that EPA has issued a permit applying to the General Electric Company plants at Hudson Falls and Fort Edwards, N.Y., which would limit discharges of PCBs to about 3 ounces a day by 1977. However, he noted, GE has challenged both the PCB limit and the time schedule, and requested a hearing. The prehearing conference, Breidenbach wrote, is scheduled for early October.

"...EPA's Offices of General Counsel and Enforcement in Washington are investigating the possibility of taking action under Section 504 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to stop immediately the discharge of PCBs, as you suggest," Breidenbach stated, noting that "such action depends on whether data exist or can be developed to establish that an 'imminent and substantial endangerment to the health of persons or to the welfare of persons' is caused by the discharge."

EPA is attempting to assess and control the PCB problem, Breidenbach maintained, pointing to activities underway, and to the national symposium on PCBs scheduled for Chicago in late fall (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Sept. 1, Page 29).

"I assure you that EPA is very concerned about the PCB problem and is taking many steps to reduce the environmental and health hazards associated with exposure to PCBs utilizing the Federal Water Pollution Control Act and other authorities," Breidenbach concluded.

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