

EPA charges Macedonia firm polluted with PCBs

By James Levine

A Macedonia firm has been charged with improperly handling and disposing of toxic polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs), a chemical suspected of causing cancer.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has cited Industrial Coatings Inc. for violations of the Toxic Substances Control Act and has proposed fining the company \$41,500. The EPA complaint says Industrial Coatings mislabeled about 50 gallons of PCB-contaminated waste oil.

The EPA has proposed fines of \$13,000 for failing to test for PCBs, \$17,000 for improper disposal, \$10,000 for not keeping adequate records and \$1,500 for not identifying machinery contaminated by PCBs. Industrial Coatings has 30 days to respond.

Michael Walker, an EPA lawyer from Chicago, said the PCBs were discovered in April when an inspection team found the firm had failed to test five die-casting machines contaminated with more than 420 gallons of PCB-contaminated hydraulic fluid.

The chemical was used as a synthetic hydraulic fluid until it was outlawed more than five years ago.

Victor Regal, president of Industrial Coatings, said he was totally surprised by the EPA inspection and didn't realize the machines might contain residual PCBs.

"The last time we could have purchased PCBs was 1972," he said. "It totally slipped by us that we could have any kind of problem. We will do whatever we can to resolve it."

He said his lawyer is helping prepare a response to the proposed EPA fines. He said, "This was kind of a kick in the rear end for us because we are very concerned about the environment."

Dr. Sheldon Simon, an EPA toxic substance expert, said Industrial Coatings was notified in 1978 of PCB regulations.

The EPA inspection team found PCBs at concentrations above the 50 parts per million legal limit on five of nine machines tested. EPA regulations require firms test machinery not later than Nov. 1, 1978, for residual PCB levels. Regal said he was not aware of the EPA deadline.

Walker said PCBs have been outlawed for five to six years. PCBs have been linked to reproductive problems in laboratory animals and to skin, respiratory and stomach problems in humans.