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PCB imports rise sharply as ban nears, Aspin says

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — Representative Les Aspin (Dem., Wis.) said Sunday that with U.S. production of the toxic chemical PCB to end in 1977, imports of the substance have risen sharply — apparently in an effort to prolong its use.

Under the new Toxic Substances Act, all use of PCB in the United States must end by June 1, 1979; but Aspin said the sole U.S. manufacturer, Monsanto Chemical Co., planned to end production by October, 1977.

"Unless imports are quickly ended," Aspin said in a statement issued by his office, "PCB's will continue to threaten the environment — and at an accelerating rate, judging from this year's imports."

He said he will ask the Environmental Protection Agency to ban further PCB imports before the 1979 legal deadline, once the incoming administration of President-elect Jimmy Carter has taken office.

Asked about Aspin's statement, an EPA spokesman said the agency has no present intention of speeding up the ban on PCB.

He said Congress allowed the two-year delay to give industries time to obtain suitable replacements for PCB, and the agency still considered that a valid approach to the problem.

PCB, a group of related chemicals called "polychlorinated biphenyls," is used in industrial and mechanical applications, including use as a coolant sealed inside electric transformers and capacitors.

It often escapes to the environment through industrial waste discharges, accidental release, and the junking of equipment containing it.

PCB has not been directly proven to harm human beings, but has been shown to cause serious illness in laboratory animals and was found by the EPA in samples of human mothers' milk, indicating that it is reaching and being absorbed by human beings.

Aspin said data from the U.S. Customs Service showed that the United States imported 316,585 pounds of PCB during the first eight months of 1976, far more than the 278,459 pounds imported during the entire year of 1972.

"The customs figures indicate that manufacturers may be building up stocks to use PCB's well after domestic manufacturing has stopped," said Aspin.

The EPA spokesman said, however, that stockpiled PCB could not be used, in any case, after the 1979 ban on further use takes effect.

Aspin said all of the 1976 imports of PCB so far have come from France, entering the United States through New York, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles.

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