

Free Press Photo by DICK TAPP

Polyvinyl chloride use may be banned.

Containers Under Fire

BY JUDY NEUMAN
Free Press Staff Writer

One type of soft plastic container—widely used for such products as shampoos and floor wax—may disappear from Michigan shelves, if a bill now in the House Committee on Economic Development becomes law.

Rep. James Smith, R-Davison, has introduced legislation which would ban the sale or use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) containers in the state after Dec. 31, 1972.

The measure is health-based, but arises from disposal of the containers, not their daily use.

When PVC (not to be confused with poisonous PCB compounds recently discovered in Michigan fish, and in cartons made of recycled paper) is incinerated, it gives off hydro-

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gen chloride gas. When mixed with water—such as mist in the atmosphere—the gas becomes hydrochloric acid.

Several experiments with hydrochloric acid have found it harmful to plants and animals.

Experiments at the University of Syracuse specifically with effluents (liquid wastes) of PVC resulted in swollen eyes, bloody discharges from the eyes and nose, and other reactions in laboratory rats.

Hydrochloric acid, in high concentrations, was also found destructive to common construction materials in research done by the TRW Systems Group, a California-based information subsidiary of TRW, Inc., Cleveland manufacturers.

Those construction materials can include the highly sensitive air pollution control devices in municipal incinerators.

There are other plastics which also contain chlorides, and which Richard Helmburg, associate professor at the University of Syracuse, finds potentially as harmful as PVC when incinerated.

These include the popular plastic wrap used for storing foods.

Rep. Smith, however, says he has no plans now to expand his bill, House Bill 5488, to include other plastics.

Cities which dispose of PVC containers by shredding and placing them in sanitary landfills are probably getting a "great" material, according to Professor Helmburg.

It does not absorb water, nor degrade to provide sites for bacterial colonies, he says.

Wayne County, which is turning more and more to sanitary landfills and compaction for waste disposal, probably is not endangered by PVC, says Howard Murray, director of Public Information for the Wayne County Air Pollution Control division.

Smaller cities, though, according to the bill's backers, are still incinerating.

Although PVC was likened to PCB during the current "scare" over the latter's discovery in food, the only apparent relationship between them is that both contain chlorine ions.

However, PCB is not formed by the incineration of PVC containers, as was feared by some persons.

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