DULUTH, MINN.
NEWS TRIBUNE
D. 55,000 S. 79,500

SEP 1 1975

Conflicting views given at hearing

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The state's two-day hearing last week on proposals to restrict discharge of the industrial chemical polychlorinated biphenyls, of PCBs, found environmentalists and industrialists in e classic struggle.

Environmentalists, including Lt. Gov. Martin Schreiber, contend that PCB levels have reached alarming proportions and threaten human life.

They want severe controls on PCB use and disposal, if not an outright ban. Industrialists, especially paper recycling companies, claim the dangers of PCBs have been exaggerated and that restrictions on the discharge of the chemical could cripple vital production.

Commercial production of PCBs began in 1929 in electrical transformers. Over the years, increased uses were found for the chemical and it made its way into such products as plastics, paints, insulating and hydraulic fluids, caulking compounds, inks, adhesives and carbonless carbon paper.

"There's not anything imaginable that at one time or another someone hasn't tried to use PCBs in," remarked W.B. Papageorge of Monsanto Chemical Co., sole producer of PCBs in the U.S.

Environmentalists were alerted to the hazards of the chemical when an outbreak of PCB poisoning hit Yushō, Japan, in the late 1960s.

The culprit was a batch of rice oil, a popular cooking ingredient.

A leaking heat exchanger, it was later discovered, had laced the oil with PCB during the manufacturing process.

Since then, federal agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency have urged stricter policies on the use of PCBs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture set tolerance levels for human consumption in various foods.

Studies by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources show that PCB contamination has become ubiquitous. Fish are the most frequent carriers of the chemical.

DNR surveillance section chief Stanton Kleinert said PCBs in fish from Green Bay, Lake Michigan, the upper Mississippi River and the Fox River near Portage exceed safe levels set by the FDA.

The agency also found shipments of carp from Lake Pepin with excessive PCB levels, resulting in orders to halt commercial carp fishing in the lake.

The state Health Department has warned anglers in certain areas not to eat more than one fish a week because of possible danger.

Unsafe PCB levels have also been found in various sewage treatment plants and in industrial discharges, particularly from paper recycling factories.

As a result, the DNR considered proposals to limit PCB discharge rates and to curtail the sale and use of the chemical.

The paper industry, pointing proudly to its record of efforts in the environmental cause, feels caught in a squeeze.

"If we were banned from discharging any PCBs at all, with our present technology, we would have to back away from the use of waste paper," said Groff Collett of Consolidated Papers, Inc., Wisconsin Rapids.

His remark was echoed by other paper recyclers.

Limits suggested by the DNR are unreasonable, too, they said, and would force companies to use economically unfeasible alternatives.

Besides, they point out, not enough is known about the sources and extent of PCBs to take hasty action.

MONS 032773