

Explosion ripped through Mobil's offices.

"fortunate no one was hurt." The company, however, is mystified about the charge of profiting from suffering, stating that it only has a small gasoline and oil marketing affiliate in Puerto Rico—Mobil Oil Caribe.

The latest bombing comes five months after the same group attacked Mobil's district offices in Waltham, Mass., on a weekend in October, 1978. No one was injured and damage was slight. A year and half ago Mobil's New York headquarters was bombed by an unrelated Puerto Rican group, the FALN (Spanish for Armed Forces of National Liberation of Puerto Rico), killing one person and forcing hundreds of Mobil workers and others to leave the building.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and local police are looking into the Eastchester incident. □

South Africa will expand coal gasification plant

Last week, the government-controlled South African Coal, Oil and Gas Corp. (Sasol) picked Fluor Corp. to build phase 3 and phase 4 extensions at its Sasol II coal-gasification facility in the Transvaal (*CW, Jan. 22 '75, p. 36*). Fluor put the project's value "in excess of $2 billion" and estimated that the new units would come onstream in 1982.

The extensions will adjoin phase 1 and phase 2 facilities now under construction at the site. Fluor will act as contractor and its South African subsidiary, Fluor South Africa Pty. Ltd., will do the construction work.

The Sasol II complex will convert coal into a synthetic crude oil that can be cleaned and refined into gasoline and diesel products, ethylene, ammonia, sulfur and coal-tar derivatives. The project will use the Synthol processing coal in the presence of steam to produce a low-Btu gas consisting mainly of carbon monoxide and hydrogen. This synthesis gas is reformed into a number of hydrocarbon building blocks that can be refined into a variety of products.

Sources in Johannesburg, meanwhile, report that Sasol will construct another major coal-gasification plant next to Sasol II for $5.7 billion, but company officials will not confirm or deny these reports.

The country may need another plant. South Africa, burdened by a U.N.-proposed trade embargo agreed to by many countries because of its apartheid policy, imported some 90% of its crude oil from Iran.

Since the new regime came into power in Iran, however, oil exports to South Africa have stopped. □

Aluminum firm finds PCB contamination

Tecumseh Products Co., reports it has found up to 32,000 parts-per-million of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in soil at its diecast division's plant in Sheboygan Falls, Wis. The company notified state officials after consultants measured the contamination in 700 samples taken at depths to 5 ft. in a 20,000-sq.-ft. area.

The contamination was caused by more than 15 years of dumping by maintenance workers of wastes containing PCBs from the plant's hydraulic casting machinery, the company says. The diecast plant, built in the mid-1950s, used a PCB-laden hydraulic fluid in equipment for injection molding of aluminum parts. The fluid was employed because other petroleum-based oils were not fire resistant and other materials could not provide the necessary performance under the high temperatures and pressures involved.

The Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) ordered Tecumseh to propose a disposal plan by July for the estimated 50,000 cu.ft. of contaminated soil. The company has already drawn up a preliminary plan for temporarily storing the soil until it finds a long-term solution.

In addition, seepage from the site has polluted the Sheboygan River, prompting DNR to warn against eating fish taken from the river.

The company discontinued use of PCB fluids in 1972, it says, when lower-cost glycol-based formulations were introduced. □

EPA offers four choices for testing under TSCA

Because of the controversy surrounding its testing procedures for compliance with the Toxic Substances Control Act, the Environmental Protection Agency this week is publishing for comment a document outlining four approaches it is considering. The alternatives, which range from no guidelines at all to a step-by-step testing regimen, will bear heavily on the cost of introducing a new chemical product to the marketplace.

The most likely approaches:

- EPA would provide general guidance on recommended tests and outline a scheme in which tests would progress to more costly and complex ones, depending on initial results.
- EPA would detail the type and extent of testing required for each new chemical on a case-by-case basis.

The agency also proposes offering manufacturers no guidance and permitting companies to make their own decisions on what testing is necessary to identify risks associated with a chemical. But because that would not provide uniform criteria, EPA officals concede that is unlikely.

In the fourth approach, EPA would publish a list of tests designed to determine certain effects of chemical exposure, such as birth defects, and manufacturers would choose the tests they felt were necessary. The drawback, according to EPA, is that it would not provide manufacturers with an accurate estimate of how much testing EPA would consider adequate.

Says EPA of the economic implications of testing: "A point of diminishing returns can be reached, where the additional social benefit of testing is offset by the cost of testing and [by] the possibility of inhibiting the development of a socially beneficial product."

To reduce the economic impact on manufacturers of low-volume chemicals, EPA proposes requiring little or no testing for those substances produced in volumes of less than 100,000 lbs./year. EPA says 70% of the chemicals reported in its inventory fall in the small-volume category.

The agency is also seeking industry's comments on the use of a "flexible base set" that would outline tests to be applied to various classes of chemicals. "This 'base set' would allow testing for a particular substance to be 'tailored' to its characteristics and, perhaps, its expected exposure patterns," the EPA document notes.

EPA expects to issue interim testing guidelines next summer and final rules by fall. □

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