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BREIDENBACH TO SUCCEED AGEE AS ASSISTANT EPA ADMINISTRATOR FOR WATER:

Andrew W. Breidenbach, director of EPA's Cincinnati research operations, will succeed James L. Agee as Assistant Administrator for Water and Hazardous Materials in Washington headquarters, *ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH LETTER* has learned. The post requires Senate confirmation, and the White House plans to nominate Dr. Breidenbach sometime in September. Agee will become a consultant in EPA's San Francisco regional office. Some people believe he will be in line to succeed Paul DeFallo, Jr., when he retires.

Dr. Thomas Duke, Director of EPA's Gulf Breeze (Fla.) Environmental Research Lab, also is headed for Washington. He will become deputy to Dr. Roy Albert, head of EPA's health effects program within the Office of Research and Development.

HEW ASKS EPA TO CONSIDER VOIDING GE'S DISCHARGE PERMIT BECAUSE OF PCBs:

Dr. Theodore Cooper, Assistant Secretary of HEW for Health, has written to EPA Administrator Russell Train to reevaluate the permit to General Electric Co. because of high rates of discharges of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the Hudson River and Lake Champlain. Ogden Reid, Administrator of the New York State Environmental and Conservation Department, has already urged voiding GE's permit, as have other conservation groups.

Dr. Cooper's letter to Train reads:

"The recent findings in both the Hudson River and Lake Champlain of high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) in food fish are of deep concern to us. The source of the PCBs in the Hudson River, at least, seems to be at least in part the discharge of this class of chemicals by industrial plants operating under a permit by EPA for such discharge.

"It is our feeling, therefore, that the rationale for the continuing license to discharge PCBs into water where they may enter the food chain should be immediately reevaluated. Various technical references, including the International Agency for Research in Cancer and studies recently completed by Kimbrough et al. confirm their carcinogenic activity in rodents. While the current state of our knowledge as to the biological activity of these substances is not complete, we feel that available evidence dictates that immediate action should be taken to terminate the discharge of PCBs. Such action would be in the best interests of protection of public health and safety by eventually terminating PCB entry into the food chain and subsequent exposure of the American people."

The problem of PCBs is not confined, of course, to water. They are in air and the general environment in many forms, and no single action can possibly hope to deal with the problem.

Glenn E. Schweitzer, Director of EPA's Office of Toxic Substances, testified before the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources August 29 that a still unpublished report (presumably referring to the report

of Dr. Kimbrough and associates of the Center for Disease Control, prepared for an upcoming issue of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute) indicates malignant liver tumors in rats exposed to one grade of PCB at levels of 100 ppm.

"Concentrations as low as 2.5 and 5 ppm have produced serious adverse health effects in monkeys, including loss of hair, acneform lesions, loss of weight, increased secretion of total urinary ketosteroids, irregularities in menstrual cycles, impaired ability to maintain pregnancy, and undersized offspring," Schweitzer said.

"In considering these effects, it is important to remember that there are eight commercial grades of PCBs, and their toxicity characteristics may vary to some degree. However, there is no basis for assuming that any one of the grades is not a potential hazard."

Schweitzer said that a water quality criteria level of 1 ppt will soon undergo inter-agency review prior to final issuance. The originally proposed level of 2 ppt has been reduced in view of the recent ecological effects data. Detailed documentation necessary to support a national standard for water effluent discharges under Section 307(a) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act is also being assembled, with issuance of a revised proposed standard scheduled in the near future.

Because of the importance of the problem, Schweitzer said EPA has undertaken more activities recently:

- The National Academy of Sciences is being requested to give special attention to whether a drinking water standard for PCBs is needed. Meanwhile, monitoring for PCBs in drinking water supplies is being expanded.

- Information concerning the best sampling and analysis techniques for PCBs in different media is being assembled and reviewed to provide guidance to the Regions, states, contractors and other organizations involved in monitoring.

- A limited number of ambient air, water, sediment, soil and fish samples are being collected and analyzed from throughout the country. This data, along with other existing information, will provide an up-to-date overview of the current level of environmental contamination by PCBs.

- In response to local concerns, several Regions will be measuring PCB levels in effluent streams from industrial and municipal sources, receiving waters and associated fish populations to assist in relating specific discharges to environmental levels of particular concern.

- Information concerning the use and distribution of PCBs and the levels of PCBs in effluent discharges has been requested from 84 companies which are believed to handle PCB compounds or mixtures in their operations. (Monsanto is believed to be the sole U.S. manufacturer of PCBs).

- A special review of past and recent data to assess the carcinogenic potential of PCBs is under way.

- Test data on the chemical properties and potential bioactivity of substitutes for PCBs have been requested from Dow Chemical and Dow Corning.

- Department of Defense, General Services Administration and other agencies will be requested to review and to amend as appropriate their procurement specifications and those of their contractors concerning the purchase of PCBs and materials containing PCBs.

"EPA considers that a PCB concentration of 1 ppt in the ambient water environment represents an appropriate goal for the nation," Schweitzer said. "This conclusion is reflected in the Water Quality Criteria which are currently undergoing final review prior to promulgation. We would suggest that this goal serve as very broad guidance in developing strategies on a nationwide basis and locally to control discharges of PCBs into our waterways.

"However, we are not prepared at this time to provide more specific guidance on the control strategies that should be adopted nationally or locally concerning the regulation of individual dischargers. We are developing a nationwide strategy with a significant component of our approach to be reflected in a toxic effluent standard for PCBs scheduled for proposal early next year. At the same time, we recognize that a nationwide standard might not be adequate in addressing local problems in some areas, and the control strategies adopted locally may of necessity require an elaboration of the national approach."

HEW'S FIVE-YEAR FORWARD PLAN EMPHASIZES ENVIRONMENTAL, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH:

HEW's Forward Plan for Health, covering the five-year period July 1, 1977-June 30, 1982, puts major emphasis on expansion of environmental and occupational health as major thrusts in a preventive health strategy designed to reduce the incidence and costs of disease. It is by far the most ambitious such plan to come out of HEW, and one can only hope at this time that it is implemented. It is currently being reviewed

by new HEW Secretary David Matthews.

After reviewing some of the well-documented links between environmental contamination and disease, the document lists the following options for PHS policy-makers:

- Formally clarify the Departmental policy on the health aspects of the environment so that a more systematic, coordinated research and regulatory effort can be undertaken between PHS and such agencies as EPA.

- Encourage legislation to form a nationwide environmental monitoring network.

- Encourage the passage of legislation to control toxic substances and explore the practicality of establishing a pre-marketing safety clearance or "early warning" system for new substances and their degradation products.

- Establish a joint programming effort between EPA and PHS to determine total exposure and body burden levels of toxic substances and effective programs to control such exposures in food, water and air.

Among the incentives, it lists encouraging private organizations and industry to develop technology to identify and reduce harmful pollutants and giving special funding priority to epidemiological studies to detect pollutant-related effects in urban industrial areas.

To do so will also require behavioral changes among the population. In this connection, the report suggests expanding educational activities in industry, universities and school systems on the health effects of environmental pollutants and promoting programs designed to alert government, industry and the general public to the hazards of environmental pollution and the ways to prevent it.

At the research level, the report cites the need to continue efforts to determine the additive and synergistic effects of pollutants; expand activity to identify the prevalence of toxic substances in food, water and air and determine the total exposure and body burden of the public to these substances; study the carcinogenic, mutagenic and teratogenic effects of long-term, low-level doses of chemical pollutants; develop more rapid, predictable tests for long-term effects of pollutants on health; ensure that the design and operation of new sources of energy do not impose excessive health burdens; establish priorities for research based on prevalence and persistence of environmental substances and their potential toxicity.

To respond to major concerns about the health impact of the environment, PHS will shortly develop a major policy paper on its role in environmental health, dealing not only with the essential knowledge development and coordination issues, but also the appropriate organization of relevant PHS activities, and the best way of providing health policy advice sought by other agencies, and by OMB and the White House on environmental health matters such as the catalytic converter, the report said. High among the activities of this review will be consideration of the role of the DHEW Committee to Coordinate Toxicology and Other Related Programs, it added.

Turning to environmental health research, the report frankly acknowledged:

"This is an area where present organizational structure currently impedes essential research on environmentally induced adverse health effects. Since the Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970, it has not, on the whole, been able to recruit and retain the caliber and number of scientists and science policy analysts to work on the wide range of very complex problems of the health effects of environmental changes and hazards.

"Also, as a result of the 1970 reorganization, HEW's relevant programs are fragmented among the H agencies. Even with the efforts of the Committee to Coordinate Toxicology and Related Programs and of NCI's Environmental Carcinogenesis program, the PHS still cannot claim to be an adequate supplement to fill the need for health-effects research and the gaps left by other Federal agencies.

"The Nation cannot afford a gap in its environmental health capacity. The consequences of hazardous environmental conditions and changes will be paid, for the most part, not by us but by our children and future generations; therefore, the obligation to remedy our disorganization and our program deficiencies is even greater. Current energy issues make this issue more acute now than ever before."

The report used vinyl chloride as an example of a substance whose effects are of concern to several HEW agencies but which remains uncoordinated. It said it was a prime concern of the National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health; both NIEHS and NIOSH were interested in it as a priority concern with identification of industrial hazards; both NCI and NIEHS plan public information programs on industrial and other environmental hazards; NCI, NIEHS, NIOSH and the National Center for Toxicological Research are all concerned with environmental etiology of cancer and all but NCTR emphasize to improve the handling of "hot" or toxic substances; the

Division of Resources Research then emphasizes its development in an "easy to use" computer to study chemical/biological interactions with no reference to its applicability in the high priority area of environmental carcinogenesis.

"These raise questions about the extent of coordination of this research area within PHS, to say nothing of the added difficulty of coordination with EPA, ERDA and other agencies," the report said. Then it cited the report of the Subcommittee on Environmental Carcinogenesis to the National Advisory Cancer Board which stated.

"There was an obvious sense of general astonishment throughout the meetings that the National Cancer Program does not appear to have accorded an adequate priority nor sense of urgency to the field of environmental carcinogenesis, particularly when this concerns chemical carcinogens. In spite of the fact that there is widespread recognition of the importance of environmental chemical carcinogenesis in the press, by the lay public and in Congress, it would seem that the problem has been accorded a low priority in the National Cancer Program, and as far as could be judged, to absorb about 10 percent of the budget. . ."

OMB HAS DENIED OR FAILED TO CLEAR ONLY 3 CHANGES IN ITS AUTHORITY, EPA SAYS:

In only three cases has the Office of Management and Budget either denied or failed to clear EPA's requests for changes in its statutory authority, according to a detailed EPA report to Rep. John Moss (D-Cal.), chairman of the House Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation. Moss had sent extensive questionnaires to all major regulatory agencies seeking a wide range of information on their practices, personnel, methods of operating, etc.

The three instances in which OMB denied or failed to clear an EPA request related to (1) the regulatory authorities in the proposed Land Protection and Waste Recovery Act submitted for clearance in 1974; (2) the amendment to Section 307 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act relating to rulemaking proceedings also submitted in 1974; (3) the proposed Toxic Substances Control Act submitted in 1975.

Moss' question (No. 66) read as follows:

"List all Office of Management and Budget denials of your Agency's requests in the last five fiscal years for proposed changes in your statutory regulatory authority." Here is EPA's answer:

"EPA came into existence on December 2, 1970. Legislative proposals for EPA for presentation to the 92nd Congress were already under review. Comprehensive amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act and to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, and new authority regarding noise control, toxic substances control, and ocean dumping were cleared by OMB and forwarded to the first session of the 92nd Congress in February 1971.

"In February 1972 two additional legislative proposals were cleared by OMB and forwarded to the second session of the 92nd Congress--the Toxic Wastes Disposal Control Act and the Sediment Control Act, both being proposed as additional amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.

"While there were changes agreed upon in these legislative proposals during the interagency review coordinated by OMB, these changes would not be viewed as denials by OMB.

"In 1973, at the first session of the 93rd Congress, legislative proposals relating to toxic substances, safe drinking water, hazardous waste management, air pollution and sediment control were cleared by OMB and forwarded to the Congress. Two proposals--relating to comprehensive environmental grants to states and to a demonstration effluent fee system--did not clear the OMB interagency review process. These latter two, however, would not be considered proposals to change the EPA statutory regulatory authority.

"In 1974 two additional proposals were submitted to OMB for clearance for submission to the 93rd Congress--the 'Land Protection and Waste Recovery Act' and three amendments to section 307 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.

"The 'Land Protection and Waste Recovery Act' was not cleared. One of the amendments to section 307 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act was also not cleared. This amendment would have amended section 307 to authorize informal rulemaking proceedings in lieu of the 'on the record' formal type proceedings.

"In January 1975 proposals were submitted to OMB for clearance for submission to the 94th Congress relating to amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act and to the Clean Air Act, and a Toxic Substances Control Act. Except for the Toxic Substances Control Act, these proposals were cleared and forwarded to the 94th Congress.

"The Toxic Substances Control Act could not be cleared prior to Senate hearings on a similar bill.

However, an Administration position with respect to toxic substances control was worked out on a bill already before the Congress, S. 776, and cleared. The Administration's position on this bill is equivalent to the bill originally proposed by EPA.

"In summary, while changes are frequently made and agreed upon for legislative proposals during the OMB interagency review process, we can find only three instances where requests for changes in our statutory regulatory authority have been denied or not cleared. These are the regulatory authorities in the proposed Land Protection and Waste Recovery Act submitted for clearance in 1974; the amendment to Section 307 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act relating to rulemaking proceedings also submitted in 1974; and the proposed Toxic Substances Control Act submitted in 1975. In this latter case, an equivalent position was worked out and forwarded to the Congress."

EPA was also asked by Moss to submit the names of employees "selected for appointment to positions at GS-15 grade equivalent or higher, proposed by the White House or referred to the White House for approval, before appointments were made."

EPA replied that "all individuals selected for non-career positions were either referred to this agency by the White House or had to have White House clearance in order to be appointed to the positions. As nearly as can be determined, at this point in time (Note: reply was dated June 30, 1975), this includes the following:"

James Agee, Lee Attaway, Gary Baise, James Barnes, Robert Baum, Barry Bergh, Donald Bliss, John Burns, Arthur Busch, Patricia Cahn, Peter Cashman, Howard Cohen, Jack Conmy, Paul DeFalco, William J. Dircks, Ann Dore, Maurice Eastin, A. Gordon Everett, John Fogarty, Ed Furia, Charlie Gentry, Michael Glenn, Fitzhugh Green, John Green, Thomas Hart, Alan Kirk, Bryan LaPlante, George Marienthal, Frances Mayo, Robert McDonald, John McGlennon, Graham McGowan, Marshall Miller, Steffan Plehn, Patti Pride, Jack Ravan, Robert Ryan, Ginger Savell, Clifford Smith, Daniel Snyder, Fred Stannard, Steve Stockmeyer, Roger Strelow, Marshall Turner, John White, Robert Zener.

The list includes both present and former EPA employees and excludes direct Presidential appointees. White House liaison officers at EPA include Courtney Justice, Special Assistant to the Assistant Administrator for Planning and Management, and Robert McDonald, Special Assistant to the Administrator.

Q. What criteria are used for determining which positions or proposed incumbents will be subject to a White House approval procedure? If these were practices that existed in the past, but no longer exist, when, by whom, and how was the change in policy and practice directed?

A. Generally, positions with a confidential relationship to a Presidential appointee are considered for Schedule C or non-career appointments (which could range from GS-7 to GS-18). This has been the practice for many years.

Q. Which agency heads have, directly or indirectly, accepted employment or compensation in the industry regulated by or subject to your jurisdiction, within five years after termination of their agency service? Itemize and specify.

A. Former Administrator William D. Ruckelshaus left the Agency 4/28/73 and went to the Department of Justice. He is now in private law practice, recently has become a legal representative for elements in the plastics industry in a case before EPA. The law firm he is involved in is Ruckelshaus, Beveridge, Fairbanks and Diamond.

Q. What statutory or other constraints, if any, are currently imposed on former agency heads and GS grade 15 equivalent or higher grade personnel in terms of their (a) representing companies regulated by your agency at informal or formal hearings? (b) appearing as representatives of citizens' groups and public interest groups? (c) appearing as independent, expert witnesses?

A. The only restraint imposed on former employees representing companies regulated by EPA or appearing as representative of citizen groups and public interest groups is found in 18 U.S.C. 207, Disqualification of former officers and employees in matters connected with former duties or official responsibilities.

Additionally, we have apprised our employees of the standards applicable to them following their departure from EPA. Interim EPA Procurement Regulations published on July 17, 1974 (final version to be published in the near future, copy attached), prescribe procedures for identifying and dealing with real or apparent conflict of interest in negotiated contracts awarded to organizations employing former EPA employees.

There is no prohibition or other constraint imposed on former employees which restrict their appearing as independent, expert witnesses.

In response to another question, EPA told Moss that one other key agency official, Alan G. Kirk III,

former Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and General Counsel, had joined Potomac Electric Power Co. as vice president and general counsel.

DOMESTIC COUNCIL TASK FORCE CREATED TO REVIEW WATER QUALITY COMMISSION REPORT

Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, acting as chairman of the National Commission on Water Quality, has ordered the creation of a special Domestic Council Task Force to review and critique the draft report of the Commission on ability of the nation to achieve the 1983 goals of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act amendments.

Rockefeller's action, in effect, gives the Administration a voice in the impact of the Commission's report, the draft of which is scheduled to be released in October, to be followed by six weeks of public hearings throughout the nation before the final report is submitted to Congress in January. Creation of the Commission was authorized by Congress to review the long-range goals of water quality when the amendments were passed in 1972. Frederick J. Clarke is Executive Director, Joe G. Moore, Jr., Program Director.

It is understood that the Task Force will also issue a public report on its assessment of the Commission's report, although details have not been determined. The Task Force is composed of economists, engineers and other technical specialists. It is headed by former Pennsylvania Governor Raymond Shafer.

Members are Bruce R. Barrett and John B. Cox, Commerce Department; George Grimes, Federal Energy Administration, W.R. Nicholas, TVA; Robert Medancy, Marion R. Scaif, William C. Shilling and Jack Witherow, EPA; Melvin L. Cotner, Agriculture Department; James Flannery, Interior Department; Joe Kalt and Fred Peterson, Council of Economic Advisers; Ronald E. Kramer, Wesley H. Long, Michael Spiro and William B. Sullivan, Commerce Department; Saul Pleeter, Labor Department; Donald R. Whitaker, NOAA. Coordinators are Joseph E. Kasputys, Keith A. Lichtenwalter, Sidney R. Galler and Robert T. Mike, all of Commerce; advisers are Jim Tozzi and Earl L. Darrah, OMB, and Edwin H. Clark, II, Council on Environmental Quality. In charge of NCWQ liaison are Donna Mitchell and Jack Waugh.

REMOVING SULFUR FROM GASOLINE COULD RELEASE DEADLY CHEMICAL, SCIENTISTS SAY

Deadly hydrogen cyanide may be released into the air if sulfur is removed from gasoline to prevent formulation of sulfuric acid emissions by platinum catalytic converters, three scientists told the American Chemical Society's annual meeting in Chicago.

Hydrogen cyanide (HCN) can be formed in small amounts when platinum catalysts are used under reducing conditions with certain gases that are present in auto exhaust and reducing conditions are necessary for the proposed dual catalysts to control nitrogen oxide emissions, reported Dr. R.J.H. Voorhoeve of Bell Laboratories, Murray Hill, N.J. Co-authors were colleagues J.P. Remeika and L.E. Trimble. Reducing catalysts are expected to proliferate in the next decade.

In the presence of sulfur dioxide, the formation of HCN by platinum catalysts is reduced to insignificant levels, Dr. Voorhoeve said. However, the proposed removal of sulfur to reduce the sulfuric acid emission hazard could increase the HCN emission hazard from dual catalysts, he pointed out.

Even with the present single oxidizing catalytic converter, reducing conditions exist in decelerating or downhill coasting in which HCN might be formed, he said, commenting:

"The implications of our results for the use of catalytic conversion of automotive exhaust deserve some comment. We cannot state whether or not HCN forms when, under reducing conditions, actual exhaust is fed over (Pt) platinum catalysts, since the composition of exhaust is more complicated than that of our feed mixtures. However, from our results, HCN formation over Pt under reducing conditions appears possible in the catalyst temperature range of 600-800°C, in the absence of sulfur dioxide (SO₂).

"It is noteworthy that removal of sulfur dioxide from the exhaust may enhance HCN production to significant levels. In view of the toxicity of HCN, the determination of HCN in catalytically treated automotive exhaust is recommended.

"A much more comprehensive analysis of the effects of catalytic exhaust treatment than heretofore reported is warranted, since other potentially hazardous compounds may be found. For instance, in the present study, in addition to HCN, carbonyl sulfide and dimethylamine were tentatively identified as components of dry reactor effluents.

"Abatement of automotive exhaust emissions in the U.S. relies heavily on the use of catalytic converter

in which CO and hydrocarbons are oxidized to carbon dioxide and water. Presently used catalysts contain platinum as the active ingredient. They operate predominantly under next oxidizing conditions.

"Future application of catalytic converters for the reduction of nitrogen oxides is a strong possibility, especially in the remainder of this decade. In some proposed devices for nitrogen oxides reduction, a platinum catalyst is used in a reducing exhaust mixture as an oxygen scavenger upstream from the proper nitrogen oxides catalyst. We have recently observed HCN in the reaction products from the reduction of nitric oxide by carbon monoxide and hydrogen in synthetic gas mixtures over platinum catalysts."

EPA PROPOSES TO LIMIT RADIOACTIVITY IN DRINKING WATER:

EPA has proposed interim regulations setting maximum levels for both natural and man-made radioactive contaminants in drinking water supplies. The proposals, published in the Federal Register (August 14) also specify analytical techniques and monitoring requirements to be used by water supply systems to determine whether the maximum levels are being exceeded.

The regulations will apply to an estimated 40,000 community water supply systems throughout the nation. They will become effective 18 months after being published in final form following a period for public comment.

The proposed maximum level for naturally-occurring radioactivity, specifically radium, is 5 picocuries per liter of water. Naturally occurring radioactivity varies from place to place due to geologic conditions, and is found primarily in ground water. Because the extent of radium contamination in public water systems is unknown, one of the purposes of the monitoring regulations is to locate contaminated systems so remedial action can be taken.

The maximum dosage of man-made radiation allowed by the proposed regulations is 4 millirems per year. Man-made radiation has a variety of sources, including fallout from nuclear weapons tests, medical and industrial uses, and effluents from nuclear power plants.

In setting the proposed maximum levels for radioactivity, EPA said it sought to provide the maximum uniform protection to the public health, taking costs into consideration and using technology and treatment techniques that are generally available to the water supplier.

Comments may be submitted in triplicate to EPA's Water Supply Division (WH-450), Washington, D.C. 20460, Attention: Comment Clerk, Radionuclides. A public hearing will also be held September 10 at EPA's Washington headquarters.

EPA had previously proposed regulations governing state implementation of the national drinking water standards and the awarding to states of Federal grants to help them supervise water supply systems. EPA's fiscal 1976 budget, still before Congress, requests \$7.5 million for drinking water grants. Allocation of grant funds to the states would be based on population (weighted 30 percent); land area (10 percent) and the number of systems serving residents, as opposed to transient, populations (60 percent).

Public hearings will be held September 3 in San Francisco and September 5 in Washington, D.C. The proposed regulations were published in the Federal Register (August 7).

SRI GETS \$476,000 CONTRACT TO STUDY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ON CHEMICAL INDUSTRY:

Stanford Research Institute has been awarded a one-year \$476,000 contract by EPA to study the economic impact of Federal environmental legislation on the chemical industry, which employs three million persons.

A team of SRI economists and engineers will assess all EPA regulations, particularly air and water pollution controls. The research is expected to provide a basis for policy decisions, including possible revisions of environmental laws, says SRI project leader F. Alan Ferguson. The chemical industry contributes about 5 percent to the gross national product and is one of the key industries on which studies are being conducted by EPA. SRI headquarters at Menlo Park, Calif.

FDA MOVES TO BAN SOME FOOD PACKAGES CONTAINING VINYL CHLORIDE:

MONS 031698

The Food and Drug Administration has proposed to prohibit certain plastic food packaging and other food-contact materials made with vinyl chloride because it "has been shown to cause cancer when inhaled by humans and is suspected of having a similar potential when ingested."

The proposal would ban the use of vinyl chloride plastics in bottles, "blister packs" boxes and other

semi-rigid and rigid packaging that comes into contact with food. The proposal would also prohibit VC plastics in coatings applied to fresh citrus fruits to retain freshness.

The proposed regulation would continue to permit VC plastics in pliable film-type wraps, gaskets, cap liners, tubing and package coatings which come into contact with food.

The action is based on evidence that residues of VC may migrate into food from the semi-rigid, rigid and generally heavier plastics. No such migration has been found from the flexible and generally thinner plastics.

FDA proposed no restrictions at this time on the widespread use of vinyl chloride plastics in potable water pipes. Present evidence shows little likelihood that VC migrates from pipes being used to transport potable water, FDA said. FDA Commissioner Alexander Schmidt commented:

"FDA and the scientific community agree that vinyl chloride poses certain risks to human health. Furthermore, there are available alternatives to the materials we propose to ban for use in contact with foods."

The Society of the Plastics Industry said it will ask FDA for a full hearing on its proposed rules, saying the agency has acted with "undue panic" in regard to the possibility of vinyl chloride migration into food from PVC bottles.

HEW MOVES TO INCLUDE ENVIRONMENT IN COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING GUIDELINES:

HEW has at long last contacted some of the state leaders in environmental health planning with a view to specific inclusion of environmental health in the guidelines to state and local planning agencies under the National Health Planning and Resources Development Act of 1974.

The discussions are still preliminary, but state and local health planners are hopeful that environment will finally come to have a fair shake in the planning programs now being formulated.

Dr. John Ackerman, Ohio Director of Health, sent a letter to Dr. Theodore Cooper, Assistant Secretary for Health at HEW, calling for inclusion of specific provision for environmental health priorities and requesting that each designated Health Systems Agency should include as part of the planning staff an appropriate number of environmental health professionals academically trained and experienced in environmental health, plus other considerations designed to give environmental health meaningful representation.

HUD REVIEWS ITS PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY:

Housing is, of course, one of the oldest environmental health problems. Long before the current emphasis on air and water pollution and the ecological crises, sanitarians, engineers and physicians were activists in developing programs for clean and hygienic housing as a cornerstone of environmental health protection. Despite the more glamorous programs of today, it still retains that status.

So it was encouraging to see evidence that the Department of Housing and Urban Development is not neglecting its environmental responsibilities because, after all, people live in their homes and can be greatly affected in the quality of their lives by what takes place in the homes.

Carla A. Hills, Secretary of HUD, put it this way in an article in the August issue of "Challenge," the agency's publication:

"We are training out field staff in environmental assessment so that they may work with state and local agencies to ensure that Federally-assisted projects are designed to make the best use of land and other natural resources; that housing projects are soundly built upon proper foundations; that their inhabitants are not exposed, in or outside their houses, to undue noise or polluted air; that the water they drink is pure; and that their waste is treated to abate pollution rather than to contribute to it. We are also working with other agencies to coordinate our policies, plans and requirements to ensure that there is no overlap and that we do not work at cross-purposes."

Assistant Secretary David O. Meeker and the staff of the Office of Community Planning and Development are responsible for HUD's environmental concern. An Office of Environmental Quality serves as the principal operating unit within that program. Under the Community Development Block Grant Program of 1974, HUD has delegated responsibility for preparing Environmental Reviews and Impact Statements to all participating local governments. Cities lacking the technical capability to meet this requirement are vulnerable to litigation, program delays and even construction halts. The entire issue of the magazine is devoted to environmental quality and HUD.