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PCB hearings are scheduled

WASHINGTON — Intensive hearings into the effects of the chemical poly-chlorinated biphenyl (PCB) have been scheduled this week by a House of Represenatives committee.

U.S. Rep. Philip E. Ruppe, R-Michigan, announced that a subcommittee of the House's Merchant Marine adn Fisheries Committee will hold oversight and investigative hearings ending Friday.

Ruppe said the purpose of the hearings is to investigate what has been doen to stop the spread of the chemical and to draft ideas for legislative solutions to prevent the chemical's continued use.

PCBs are fire resistant solutions used as insulating agents in electrical equipment, especially high power transformers. PCBs often enter the environment through accidental spillage into streams, lakes and other waters as well as seepage from landfill operations.

The spillage occurs during construction, transportation and disposal of products containing the PCB solutions. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that over 12 million pounds of PCB is introduced into the environment annually.

The problem occurs when PCBs are consumed by fish, later to enter the human food cycle. Fish in several bodies of water carry concentrations above five parts per million, the state level suggested by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

"The PCB contamination of fish poses a severe threat to the commercial and sport fishing of the Great Lakes, the Hudson River, the Upper Mississippi River, adn the Southern California areas of the Pacific Ocean," Ruppe said.

"I am pleased that EPA finally moved to meet this threat to public health," he continued, "but I am convinced that we need to do more than merely eliminate the continued, albeit accidental, discharge of PCBs into this nation's waterways."

Appearing at Wednesday's hearings were Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Nathaniel Reed. Also testifying was EPA Administrator Russell Train.

Late last month, Train annoUnced a seven point "emergency", plan to combat PCB contamination.

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