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Congressman assails importing of chemical

Associated Press

WASHINGTON Rep. Les Aspin, D-Wis., said Sunday that with U.S. production of the toxic chemical PCB to end in 1977, imports of the substance have risen sharply — apparently in an effort to prolong its use.

PCB, a group of related chemicals called "polychlorinated biphenyls," is used in industrial and mechanical applications.

Under the new Toxic Substance Act, all use of PCB in the United States must end by June 1, 1979. But Aspin said the sole U.S. manufacturer, Monsanto Chemical Co., planned to end production by October 1977.

"Unless imports are quickly ended," Aspin said in a statement issued by his office "PCBs will continue to threaten the environment — and at an accelerating rate, judging from this year's imports."

He said he will ask the Environmental Protection Agency to ban further PCB imports before the 1979 legal deadline.

Asked about Aspin's statement, an EPA spokesman said the agency has no present intention of speeding up the ban on PCB.

He said Congress allowed the two-year delay to give industries time to obtain suitable replacement, and the agency considers that a valid approach.

PCB has not been directly proven to harm human beings, but has been shown to cause serious illness in laboratory animals and was found in samples of human mothers' milk, indicating that it is being absorbed by human beings.

Aspin said data from the U.S. Customs Service showed that the United States imported 316,585 pounds of PCB during the first eight months of 1976, far more than the 276,459 pounds imported during all of 1973.

"The customs figures indicate that manufacturers may be building up stocks to use PCBs well after domestic manufacturing has stopped," said Aspin.

The EPA spokesman said, however, that stockpiled PCB could not be used after the 1979 ban on further use.

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