

MAR 7 1976 *efh*

New chemicals cited as reason to strengthen EPA

By DOROTHE ERWIN

The latest bad actors among environmental chemicals—vinyl chloride and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)—prove that national legislation to require testing and controls on commercial chemicals is long overdue, according to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deputy administrator John Quarles.

Quarles, on a regular inspection visit to the Dallas regional office of EPA, said the agency needs its hand strengthened to protect the public from some of the approximately 700 new chemicals introduced every year without testing health effects.

While chemicals in foods, drugs, cosmetics and pesticides are tested and regulated under other federal programs, Quarles said, "the vast majority of new chemicals are in industrial uses that are not subject to regulation."

He said EPA is hopeful that 1976 finally will bring congressional agreement

on a toxic substances control bill that was first introduced in 1971.

BILLS WERE PASSED by both the House and Senate in 1972 and 1973 but in differing forms that could not be compromised. This year, House and Senate versions are closer together than in the past. Recent disclosures of the health hazards from vinyl chloride, PCBs and pesticides have pointed up the gaps in present knowledge and in legal protections, Quarles said.

EPA has no authority to require industry to test chemicals before using or marketing them, except in pesticides.

"In many instances—and vinyl chloride is a good example—chemicals have been used for years with virtually no testing," Quarles said.

The discovery that some workers exposed to vinyl chloride in industry were dying of a rare form of liver cancer set off the intensive investigation of that chemical, which has been widely used in consumer products ranging from food wrappers to water pipes.

THE FOOD AND DRUG Administration banned its use as an aerosol propellant in 1974. EPA undertook plant monitoring, with companies' voluntary compliance, and then in December proposed limits on the plants' vinyl chloride emissions (under a provision of the Clean Air Act) to protect people living near them.

Meanwhile, however, 15 cases of the fatal liver cancer among plant workers have been confirmed in America and other studies have linked the chemical with other liver disorders, other cancers in mice and rats and high rates of birth defects in humans.

PCBs, used widely for 40 years as insulating fluids in electrical equipment and in a variety of other products, have been found to cause reproductive failures in birds, fish and monkeys and later evidence indicates they may cause cancer in mammals. They accumulate in human fatty tissues. Unacceptably

high levels have made some Great Lakes fish inedible.

LACKING AUTHORITY to restrict uses of PCBs, EPA two months ago began a push to eliminate them from plants' air and water waste discharges (which it can regulate by law) and for a voluntary limitation by manufacturers and users. EPA said then, however, that "hundreds of millions of pounds" of PCBs were in the environment and would remain there to move into life systems unimpeded.

Both the Senate version of the toxic substances bill (which was approved in committee last month) and the House version (still in committee) would require manufacturers to test certain suspect groups of chemicals and report test results to EPA before marketing them. EPA could restrict or prohibit their use if adverse health effects outweigh their benefits. Still in dispute is the extent of the pre-market screening that EPA itself should perform.