25-10B ELECTRICAL
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MC GRAW-EDISON TAKES THE PLUNGE; WILL BUILD ONLY NON-PCB CAPACITORS after Nov. 1. This is an accelerated schedule for McGraw-Edison's planned shift to the manufacturer of Edisol-filled units, a speedup brought on by the rising public concern about the harmful effects of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) on human health and the environment and the wide utility acceptance of non-PCB units. McGraw-Edison Power Systems president William Kingsolver said utility orders for non-PCB capacitors in August accounted for two-thirds of all the company's business in capacitors that month. When McGraw-Edison last December announced that it had successfully tested a Dow Chemical fluid substitute for PCBs (now named Edisol) in capacitor banks, the old-line electrical equipment manufacturer said it would use the substitute only as its customers came to accept it. Now with wide market acceptance and growing public concern, McGraw-Edison has decided to use the alkylated-chlorodiphenyl-oxide-based fluid that is claimed to have similar or better dielectric qualities with significantly less harmful potential than PCBs.

McGraw-Edison's action comes in the wake of recent action in New York penalizing General Electric for releasing PCBs into the Hudson River, a scare in South Carolina about PCBs getting into the state waterways from a Sangamo Electric plant, and a $500-million class-action suit filed last week in Georgia blaming Monsanto and General Electric for PCB pollution that closed the Coosa River near Rome to fishing. PCBs are used in all power capacitors for utility applications and in nonflammable transformers installed in industrial plants. McGraw-Edison is believed to be the first capacitor manufacturer in the U.S. to go exclusively to a non-PCB insulating fluid for its units. Kingsolver said that McGraw-Edison and Dow had offered the fluid and background technology to other capacitor manufacturers but that "none of the proposals has yet been accepted." He said, however, that some competitors have been investigating possible alternatives to the use of PCBs. Kingsolver also predicted that the price differential between the PCB-filled units and the Edisol-filled units will decrease as Edisol is more widely used. He said that "we are convinced we have a product right now that utilities can use to eliminate a serious environmental hazard in new installations while not detracting from, but improving, electrical performance."

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has made no public comment on the acceptability of Edisol as a substitute for PCBs in capacitors, although the federal agency has been encouraging both the chemical and the electrical manufacturing industries to search diligently for a PCB substitute. McGraw-Edison said that Dow Chemical has presented to EPA the environmental data on the Edisol fluid and has also communicated with several state environmental agencies on the fluid. One industry source said that nobody expected EPA to endorse a single industry product but that the industry has received no adverse comment about Edisol from EPA.