PRODUCTS WITH SMALL AMOUNTS OF PCBs POSE REGULATORY PROBLEMS, EPA TOLD

Products containing "small" amounts of polychlorinated byphenyls (from one ounce to three pounds) are posing regulatory problems for the Environmental Protection Agency Work Group on PCBs. Group heard testimony Dec. 20 from Nathan Ray Clark of the Electronic Industries Association who said that such small amounts of PCBs occur in so many household items that they would be almost impossible to regulate and should be exempt from PCB regulations. They would be controlled as manufacturers discontinue using PCBs, he suggested.

John Hesse of Michigan's Department of Natural Resources noted that regulations already adopted in his state exempt capacitors holding less than three pounds of PCBs. In contrast, Great Lakes Fishery Commission spokesman Carlos Ferrerolf expressed concern that these small amounts of PCBs would accumulate in the environment.

Discussing the disposal of capacitors containing PCBs, Bill Phillipsbar of Rollins Environmental Services, Inc., a firm operating three hazardous waste incinerators in New Jersey, Louisiana, and Texas, said that while the high energy incinerators could handle PCB liquids, the capacitors themselves have ruined costly refractories in the incinerator mechanisms. Possible approaches include shredding the capacitors or cleansing them with a solvent and burying the container while incinerating the PCBs. Phillipsbar said both alternatives would raise disposal costs and increase areas of possible contamination.

Phillipsbar outlined his suggestions for disposal of PCB-contaminated materials as follows: (1) liquids with high PCB content would be easiest to handle and could be incinerated; (2) aqueous mixtures with high water content could be incinerated, vaporizing the water and oxidizing the PCBs but handling large quantities could be problematic; (3) dirt containing PCBs could be incinerated, thereby oxidizing the PCBs and leaving dirt intact; (4) transformers containing PCBs could be incinerated, but large transformers would be extremely costly to purify; (5) fabrics containing PCBs could be sent through incineration in a polytheline lined drum; (6) sludge could be incinerated in a very costly process; and (7) residual PCBs in pipes would have to be disposed in secure landfills.

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STATE DEPARTMENT GROUP DISCUSSES CONVENTION FOR INCINERATION AT SEA

Incineration of hazardous materials at sea, "when carried out under strictly observed safety criteria and regulations, is a safe, relatively non-polluting means for disposing of toxic, combustible, chemical wastes," concludes a discussion paper prepared for a State Department work group which is developing a U.S. position on international regulation of ocean incineration.

Meeting for the first time last week, the work group discussed draft articles for a future international convention. Draft proposed that each nation involved designate an appropriate authority to issue special permits for incineration at sea of hazardous matter, and to issue research permits when scientific and technical documentation on the suitability of a vessel or waste is insufficient.

No permit should be issued, articles said, if emission products containing specified hazardous materials in excess of trace amounts will not be rapidly rendered harmless in the marine environment. Permits should be issued only after a determination that incineration is the most practical method and has the least adverse environmental impact of disposal alternatives, articles noted. Incineration should take place in specified zones, articles stated, with zone designated on the basis of the effects of incineration operations on human health and welfare, land and shorelines, fishery resources, navigation and alternative uses of the ocean.

Addressing the question of incinerator design, discussion paper suggested that incinerators operate at a flame temperature range of 1200° to 1600°C, with a dwell time range for liquid atomized wastes of 0.5 to 1.5 seconds; that incinerators be equipped with automatic feed cut-off provisions in the event of either a flame-out or a reduction in reactor temperature below the temperature known to give complete combustion; that laboratory space be available on the ship for measurement of oxygen, chlorine and carbon monoxide; and that equipment and piping be provided to permit release of ammonia into the gaseous emission at a point above the incinerator stack.

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