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Company To Begin Using PCB Substitute

By WILLIAM STRACENER

COLUMBIA (UPI) — McGraw-Edison Company's power systems division will begin replacing the chemical compound PCB in its manufacture of high-voltage power capacitors with a new, less toxic and more environmentally acceptable insulating fluid, the company said Thursday.

The new compound, Edisol, went into commercial production in March at the company's Greenwood plant after five years of development, and will raise the cost of capacitors about 25 per cent over the current PCB-insulated versions, said Robert H. Keith.

The change, which is effective Nov. 1, was announced at a news conference by Keith, general manager of the Greenwood plant, in Columbia. A similar announcement was made in Pittsburgh by W.S. Kingsolver, president of the division.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) have come under attack in recent years as possible causes of cancer. Japan has banned their use, and Congress is considering a bill that would outlaw their use in the United States in two years.

The compounds, which have been in existence for 40 years, have been found in mother's milk, cattle and fish. Sangamo Electric Co. in Pickens County was identified as a source of PCBs found in Lake Hartwell recently.

Mcgraw-Edison officials said at least one fourth of the PCBs produced each year — four to five million pounds — are used in power capacitors. Utilities use the capacitors to improve electrical service.

"Initial response to Edisol from the utilities was good," Kingsolver said.

"Demand for high voltage capacitors having the non-toxic fluid had steadily increased as more utilities turn away from PCBs. Recent orders show that more than two-thirds of those received for new units in all sizes specify the non-PCB fluid.

"Because we expect that trend to continue or even to accelerate, all production at our Greenwood plant is being converted to non-PCB capacitors."

Keith said the changeover will cost "several hundreds of thousands of dollars" but will not involve any major personnel changes.

McGraw-Edison competes in the power capacitor field with Sangamo, General Electric and Westinghouse, and the conversion does mean an economic risk if customers continue to seek PCB-insulated units, he said.

Kingsolver said utilities are discovering capacitors can help save fuel and hold down generating capacity needs.

Edisol, developed jointly by McGraw-Edison and Dow Chemical Co., has a longer life expectancy and "is proving to be superior to PCBs electrically," Keith said.

"We are firmly convinced Edisol can do a better job than PCBs," he said.

Edisol is a more expensive fluid, but Keith said he expects the price of the capacitors to drop as PCBs become less available.

Monsanto Chemical, the sole U.S. supplier of PCBs, is trying to get out of the business and has indicated it will not absorb any losses as the supply dwindles. That would mean a higher price for PCBs and a smaller differential with Edisol, he said.

Some PCBs have been discharged from the company's Greenwood plant, "but there is no indication that the discharges have reached intolerable levels," he said.

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