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PCB Incineration

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Toxic Materials News

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LOCAL OPPOSITION SLOWS PCB INCINERATION PROGRAM

There may not be any high temperature incineration facilities approved for on-demand disposal of liquid polychlorinated biphenyls until next year, Environmental Protection Agency Assistant Administrator Steven Jellinek told the capacitor industry last week. Responding to a capacitor industry request from the ad hoc committee on liquid dielectric fluids, which called for prompt action to approve incinerators for PCB disposals (TMN, July 11, 1979, p. 221), Jellinek reminded the committee that three such facilities are awaiting final approval, but that industry will have to continue storing PCBs until EPA-approved incinerators are available.

Jellinek noted that local opposition to the siting of these facilities is becoming a major stumbling block in the agency's efforts to site incinerators. One community has already passed a law prohibiting PCB incinerators at one of the sites, although the test burn is going ahead with the aid of a special court sanction. (The company is challenging the county ordinance in court.) The two other proposed facilities are also running into community resistance to the idea of peaceful co-existence with an incineration facility, Jellinek said.

Industry Urges Preemption of 'Unreasonable' Local Opposition

Jellinek's reply was not well received by the committee. Attorney Steven Rosenthal wrote Jellinek Aug. 7 urging the agency to use its authority under the Toxic Substances Control Act to preempt such local regulations when they are unreasonable and unnecessarily preventing proper PCB disposal. "EPA ought not to permit localities to ban demonstratively safe disposal of PCBs and thereby stymie a program mandated by an act of Congress (Sec. 6(e) of TSCA) and carefully implemented through the PCB ban regulations," he said.

The preemption rulings are necessary, Rosenthal explained, because even though PCBs are being stored "in strict conformance with EPA regulations," there is always a risk of a fire or explosion which could lead to a substantial spill or release of PCB into the environment. Rosenthal emphasized that the industry was not primarily concerned with the costs of PCB storage, but was concerned with the potential for a serious environmental contamination incident.

Corrections of the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission's water quality standards affecting the Main Stem of the Ohio River, which include limits on PCB levels in water, are published. EPA. July 30 FR p. 44616.

A major search for toxic substances in the waters of central Puget Sound has been undertaken to determine how toxic contaminants affect marine fishes in the area's ecosystems, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Aug. 6. The \$6.5-million, 5-year study will investigate the distribution and levels of concentrations of three classes of toxic compounds: petroleum constituents (aromatic hydrocarbons), synthetic organics (PCB) and trace metals (lead, zinc, cadmium and iron). Study will try to link specific pollutants with specific abnormalities such as liver tumors, skin cancer and fin rot in bottom fishes.

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