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EPA, Interior implore Congress

Ask authority to ban PCBs

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WASHINGTON — Two top federal officials have asked Congress to pass laws giving them the authority to ban the chemical PCB, described as a *significant hazard* to health and the environment.

"No matter how painful the solution may be, I support a national ban on all domestic and imported PCBs;" said Asst. Interior Sec. Nathaniel P. Reed.

Reed and Russell Train, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, were the first two witnesses late Wednesday at hearings called by a House fisheries and wildlife subcommittee on the recently recognized dangers of PCBs.

TRAIN, WHO announced EPA rules in December designed to cut down on PCB use, said his authority is limited by existing law. He told the subcommittee that all of the toxic substance control bills before Congress "would greatly strengthen our hand in beginning to control the problem of toxic substances entering the environment," including PCBs.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are used in the manufacture of capacitors, transformers and other industrial products in the United States and many other countries. They are similar to DDT in chemical construction and not readily biodegradable.

State and federal laboratory tests have linked PCBs to a variety of human illnesses from skin lesions to miscarriages. In a broader sense, they affect the chain of life, first contaminating basic foods and then invading human body fat.

REED, THE assistant secretary of fish, wildlife and parks, testified that PCBs affect the fetus of pregnant women and can cause headaches, swelling of the eyelids, temporary loss of vision and many other problems.

Environmental groups and have been urging the EPA and many members of Congress the Food and Drug Administration to ban the production and use of PCBs.

The FDA sets a maximum level of 5 parts per million of PCBs in fish, for example. But Canada's limit for fish is half that.

BOTH REED AND Train noted that Lake Michigan, the most severely contaminated of the Great Lakes in terms of PCB levels, has shown concentrations up to 165 parts per million in trout.

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