Chemical Marketing Reporter

Volume 209 February 2, 1976 Number 5

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NEWS

PCB's Pg3

Ford Administration uses controversial chemicals as means of fighting fire under Congressmen sitting on toxic substance bills. Monsanto to halt PCB's.

PCB's Problem Fuels Drive For Toxic Substances Laws

Problems resulting from contamination of the environment by polychlorinated biphenels (PCB's) were the fuel used last week by Administration spokesmen to stoke the fires under Congress to act favorably – and soon – on a broad toxic substances control bill still smoldering in Senate and House committees.

Although Monsanto Company, sole producer of PCB's in this country intends to phase out production as soon as an adequate substitute is available, arguments presented to the House Merchant Marine Committee by top officials of the Interior Department and Environmental Protection Agency were that this is not enough – authorities need to curb all chemical hazards to health and the environment.

Whether the Senate and House committees considering the toxic substances bills will take early action is not clear at this time, but talk among members of the Merchant Marine Committee following its hearings last week was that it might grab the ball and bring in a bill of its own, limited to restricting PCB's use in this country because of their threat to fisheries and wild life which come under this committee's jurisdiction. Administration spokesmen, however, argued against this piecemeal approach to the problem.

Office of Management & Budget, meanwhile, has prepared a series of amendments to the McCollister bill, HR 7664, which were to be forwarded to the House Interstate Commerce Committee by the end of last week.

The Administration has endorsed the McCollister bill in principal over the Eckhardt bill, 10318, and the Tunney bill in the Senate, S 776.

EPA Administrator Russell Train in testifying on the PCB situation and detailing the steps the agency has taken to curb PCB uses, explained that all of the toxic substance control bills pending contain essential authority which would greatly strengthen the government's hand in controlling the problem of toxic substances entering the environment.

They would require EPA to keep track of chemical substances being manufactured processed or imported. They would require the testing of chemicals which appear to pose a risk to health or the environment and are not covered adequately by other laws. Immediate action could be taken against particularly hazardous chemicals.

Food & Drug Administration, which is expected to be called for testimony later by the committee, will be asked what it is doing to meet the problem of food supplies contaminated by the chemical, particularly fish.

At the present time the FDA tolerance for PCB's in food is five parts per million. Recently, Canada reduced its tolerance to two ppm. FDA is reported to be considering a reduction in its tolerance level and will be asked about this by the committee.

Monsanto's plans to get out of the PCB business were announced to the House committee by the firm's representative William B. Papageorge. After reciting the steps the company has taken voluntarily to curb sales and uses of the chemicals, he said Monsanto has informed the US capacitor and transformer industries of its intentions, but gave no timetable. These industries are the only ones Monsanto has been selling PCB's to since 1972.

"Monsanto has no desire to remain in the PCB manufacturing business any longer than is necessary," Mr. Papageorge said. "By this we mean that as soon as we are satisfied that the electrical power supply industry's needs for usable, acceptable alternate dielectric fluids have been met by whomever, Monsanto will voluntarily shut down its PCB manufacturing unit.

Nathaniel P. Reed, assistant Interior secretary for fish and wildlife, made a vigorous plea before the committee for legislation to place a "national ban on all domestic and imported PCB's."

Citing figures of PCB contamination of fish in waters in the districts of a number of the committee members, Mr. Reed said that "we must have as our goal the elimination of PCB's from the environment as rapidly as possible. I recommend that the critical or essential use of PCB's in transformers and capacitors be immediately and critically reviewed in the light of current potential replacement products."

He was strongly supported during the following two days of the hearings by testimony from a number of environmental protection groups reciting the effects of PCB's on important species of food fish and birds.

Mr. Reed said, however, that if the FDA should lower the permissible contamination level to the two ppm established by Canada it will mean the end of commercial fishery in the Great Lakes.