

SEP 13 1976

CLIPPED BY
BACONS



PCB pollution has extended even to such remote spots as this lake in South Africa.

SAFETY & HEALTH

The evidence mounts against PCBs

For the first time, PCBs, a group of chemicals that have long been suspected of causing illnesses ranging from dermatitis to cancer, have been pinpointed as the cause of several industrial cancer deaths. Mobil Corp. announced that 7 out of 92 workers who were exposed to PCBs from 1963 to 1968 at its Paulsboro (N.J.) refinery developed cancer. Six have now died, and Mobil says two of the deaths are attributable to PCBs, which the company used to make process catalysts at that time. And in an unpublished study, Monsanto Co., the sole U.S. producer of the chemicals, reports that an abnormally high number of its deceased workers had died of lung cancer.

The fatality reports added further emphasis to announcements this week that PCBs, which are widely used as insulating fluids in transformers and capacitors, are more prevalent than anyone had previously suspected. The Environmental Protection Agency has found PCBs in mother's milk in tests in 10 states. And Yvonne and Algidra Greichus, researchers from South Dakota State University, told an American Chemical Society convention that PCBs have shown up in dangerous quantities in such unlikely places as lakes near South Africa's Hartbeestort Dam.

Federal limits. These disclosures further complicate an already complex legal battle between electrical equipment manufacturers, environmentalists, and the EPA. In July the agency called for a reduction of PCBs in a plant's effluent

discharge to no more than one part per billion by January, 1978. Most users say they cannot possibly meet this deadline, and they will ask for a one-year extension.

Monsanto has told users it will end PCB production by late 1977 and that its stockpiles will be depleted by May, 1978—a few months past the January deadline. "Why spend millions [for effluent-control equipment] to cut discharges for six months?" asks Clifford H. Tuttle, president of Aerovox Industries Inc., a manufacturer of electrical equipment. He says that the industry is 18 to 22 months away from converting to substitutes for PCBs.

For its part, the EPA is sympathetic to the industry's plight. "The proposed regulations do present some difficulties to the users," notes R. Kent Baintline, an engineer in EPA's standards division.

But the agency's hands may be tied. It recently signed a consent agreement to end an environmentalist-sponsored lawsuit that would have forced it to step up control of toxic substances. Under the agreement, EPA must immediately start setting up standards for several toxics, including PCBs. By law, it must enforce the PCB standard within a year of its enactment. The agency has already asked Congress for legislation that might allow it to extend the PCB-enforcement deadline. Aside from EPA's move, the House and Senate have passed separate bills banning PCB production, but have not resolved differences in conference.