House Votes Curb On PCB Output

By Mary Russell
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House, in a surprise move yesterday, voted to ban within two years the manufacture of polychlorinated biphenyls, a hazardous chemical that recently showed up in mother's milk in Michigan.

On a voice vote, the House accepted an amendment to the toxic substances control bill to ban within one year the manufacture of PCBs for use not inside an enclosed container, and within two years, the manufacture of PCBs for any use.

PCBs have been extensively studied and are known in laboratory tests to cause reproductive failure, gastric disorders, skin lesions and tumors. Moreover, they are not biodegradable and accumulate in the food chain. They have been found in fish and the flesh of cattle and, more recently, in mother's milk.

Reps. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.) and Gilbert Gude (R-Md.) sponsored the PCB manufacturing ban amendment. Ingell said commercial fishing in the Great Lakes and the Hudson River has already been shut down because of PCB contamination.

The toxic substances control bill is designed to prevent hazardous chemicals from coming into the marketplace and would give the Environmental Protection Agency general authority to ban PCBs. But Dingell said it could take years under the bill and the ban should go into effect sooner.

Under Dingell's amendment, six months after the toxic substances control bill is enacted, the EPA would have to inact regulations on the disposal of PCBs and require warnings of the dangers.

PCBs are used in electrical capacitors and transformers because they can withstand great heat without igniting.

Rep. Bob Eckhardt (D-Tex.) argued that the EPA has already started to act on PCBs with authority it has under the Water Pollution Control Act, but Dingell and his supporters contended that was not fast enough.

Later the House passed by a 319-to-45 vote the toxic substances bill, which would allow the EPA to control manufactured chemicals.

The bill has passed the Senate in a slightly stronger form and will go to a House-Senate conference to resolve the differences.

The legislation has been pending in Congress since 1970, but until now has been held on in House-Senate conferences because in the past the House did not include pre-market testing standards similar to the Senate's.

This year, the testing requirement is not expected to prevent agreement between the two bodies, leaving only the question of whether President Ford will sign the bill into law.

Both bills would require a producer to notify the Environmental Protection Agency 90 days before starting to make a new chemical, so the EPA could determine whether tests of chemical deemed harmful were necessary.

In the Senate bill, the EPA administrator could issue an order to prevent marketing pending tests if the environment or humans would be substantially exposed to the substance and a reasonable health hazard risk existed.

In the House bill, if the EPA determined a chemical may be dangerous and further testing should be done by the manufacturer, it could seek a court injunction against production pending tests of the chemical.

The problem of chemical pollution has been of increasing concern to environmentalists who consider this bill one of the most important environmental measures in this Congress.

While there are 30,000 chemicals in use today and an estimated 1,000 new ones marketed each year, only pesticides, drugs and food additives undergo federally required testing before they are sold.

The National Cancer Institute estimates that 80 to 90 per cent of the cancers in the country result from environmental contaminants.

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