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EPA TO HOST NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PCBs

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Russell E. Train announced today that EPA, in cooperation with several other Federal agencies, will host a national conference to discuss environmental contamination by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a group of industrial chemicals, November 19-21 at the Pick Congress Hotel in Chicago, Illinois. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare will moderate a special session the first day of the conference devoted to recent information about health aspects of exposure to PCBs.

"PCBs have long been a grave matter of concern for EPA and all people who work for a clean environment," Train said. "Action taken in 1972 was expected to reduce PCB discharges to the environment, but recent evidence indicates the continued presence of high concentrations of these chemicals in fish in several of our nation's waterways. This conference will help EPA clarify the feasibility of further steps to help reduce PCB contamination of the environment."

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PCBs have been widely used by industry over the past 40 years, most commonly as insulating fluid in certain electrical transformers and capacitors. PCBs have also been used as hydraulic fluids, lubricants, heat transfer fluids, and plasticizers in adhesives, sealants, printing inks, coatings, and waxes. Ingestion of sufficient amounts of PCBs has been found to cause reproductive defects and death in fish, birds, and mammals. High PCB levels have been detected in salmon, striped bass, and other fish in the Great Lakes, the upper Mississippi River, Southern California, the Gulf of Mexico, and in several waterways in New York State.

Environmental groups, State and Federal agencies have called on EPA to address the PCB problem.

The conference will bring together the latest data and best available expertise to help clarify the problems associated with manufacture, use, and disposal of PCBs. Train, keynote speaker at the conference, said that the Chicago meeting "will provide the opportunity for presentation of new information and previously neglected information concerning the toxicity of these chemicals. It will also provide a platform for interested parties to make suggestions concerning the PCB problem."

The effectiveness of steps taken since 1972 to reduce environmental contamination by PCBs will also be discussed. A Federal government task force that year issued a report recommending discontinuance of all PCB uses other than use in electrical transformers and capacitors. Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Company, the sole U.S. producer of PCBs, agreed in 1972 to limit its PCB sales to manufacturers of these "closed" electrical systems. Because of persistently high PCB levels being found today in fish, EPA is attempting to discover if PCB use is widespread in applications other than closed systems. PCBs produced in foreign countries but sold to U.S. firms may be contributing to the problem.

EPA officials hope the Chicago conference will clarify the feasibility of further steps that could be taken by government or private industry to help reduce PCB contamination of the environment.

Representatives from industry, conservation groups, the scientific community, local and State governments, and the Federal government will be invited to participate. The conference is free and open to the public. Dr. John Buckley of EPA will serve as general chairman. Persons who want to participate and those who want to attend should contact the administrative coordinator for the conference, Mr. Franklin A. Ayer, Research Triangle Institute, P.O. Box 12194, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27709. Telephone: (919) 549-8311.

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