BUSINESS NEWSLETTER

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A $25-million methanol plant will be built by First Mississippi's new subsidiary, Methchem Corp. The unit, which should be marketing commercial quantities by first-quarter '73, will have about 200-million-gal./year capacity. Site was not disclosed. First Mississippi President John Babbitt, Jr., says consumption of methanol is growing at more than 10%/year, and that by the time the company gets its new installation in operation, demand will be up to 900 million gal./year. It's now about 660 million gal./year, with about half of it going into production of formaldehyde. First Mississippi is also a partner in construction of a 70-million-lbs./year melamine plant and a recently completed $35-million urea and ammonia complex, both at Donaldsonville, La.

Scratch another chemical because of pollution charges. Monsanto will further limit sales of its polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) plasticizer, no longer market it as a water-resistant plasticizer or as a hydraulic fluid. PCB was scored by Representative William Ryan (D., N.Y.) because of evidence that, somewhat like DDT, it persisted in the environment and accumulated in fish and birds. Monsanto has had a program since '68 to keep PCB from fouling the environment (*CW, Apr. 22, p. 17*). The company will continue selling the material for use as a coolant for transformers, since there is no danger of contamination when it's used in a closed system.

Tenneco will expand its pipeline system to increase long-term natural gas deliveries to its distributors. The company has awarded a construction contract to Joyce Western Corp. to add 125 miles of 36-in. pipeline in western Pennsylvania parallel to the existing Texas-to-New England system. It will also add a total of 32,000 horsepower to five compressor stations. Increased gas deliveries are expected to begin with the '70-'71 heating season. Completion of the new units will raise the system's total design gas transmission capacity to 3.56 billion cu.ft./day.

Meanwhile, Collins Pipelines, a joint venture of Tenneco Oil and Murphy Oil, started construction of a 124-mile, 16-in. common carrier pipeline to carry petroleum products from the New Orleans area to Collins, Miss. It will connect with the Colonial and Plantation Pipeline systems there. Initial capacity of the new line, 65,000 bbls./day, will be increased to 100,000 bbls.

Ethyl Corp. is poised for a plunge into the detergent business. Company officials won't confirm it, but the company likely will become the third U.S. producer of nitrilotriacetic acid (NTA), the suddenly booming replacement for the phosphate builders. Ethyl has a patented process that evolved from development work it did as early as the mid-'60s. Its move into the business, though, hinges on a market survey it's doing and on getting a good contract from a major NTA consumer such as Procter & Gamble, which says it is ready to spend about $167 million for NTA supplies (*CW, July 15, p. 23*).

The only commercial producers of NTA now are Hampshire Chemical (a divi-

sion of W.R. Grace) and Monsanto, a Hampshire licensee. Hampshire has a 60-million-lbs./year plant at Nashua, N.H. Monsanto is now doubling capacity of its 75-million-lbs./year unit at Chocolate Bayou, Tex., and plans a giant 200-million-lbs./year NTA installation; site for the latter has not been disclosed.

Britain's chemical exports and imports were tied up by a nationwide dock strike last week. A prolonged walkout could be disastrous for the country's chemical producers, which rely heavily on imported raw materials. Industry sources say "emergency" raw-material stocks will last only about three weeks. The British government is expected to use troops to unload fuel and food supplies, but chemicals aren't considered to be critical. Last year Britain's chemical exports totaled $1.8 billion, imports about $1.7 billion. In the first quarter of this year, exports reached $440 million, imports $312 million.

Pollution suits in Texas: one settled, one likely to be settled. Goodyear Tire & Rubber agreed to pay $20,000 in civil penalties in settlement of a water pollution suit filed by Harris County about a year ago. The company also agreed to a permanent injunction requiring its synthetic rubber plant to meet requirements specified in permits issued by the Texas Water Quality Board. Goodyear says it will install $800,000 worth of new water treatment equipment at its complex near Houston.

Armco Steel faces possible fines totaling $880,000 and a temporary injunction on operations of its Houston, Tex, plant. The installation allegedly violated state air pollution regulations. A hearing on the suit, filed against the company by the state and county, is being held in Houston district court by Judge Wilmer Hunt. The hearing is expected to be completed by the end of this week.

Meanwhile, Texas has been warned by U.S. Interior Secretary Walter Hickel to stop companies from dumping mercury in the state's waterways. The Secretary wired Governor Preston Smith that he would take legal action if the state did not act promptly. Smith says Hickel's wire is unwarranted, that the state is aware of the potential problem and "various agencies have been conducting tests for some time."

Hugh Yantis, executive director of the Texas Water Quality Board, tells *Chemical Week* that mercury dumping in Texas is a matter of concern but not at the "emergency" level. He adds that industries using mercury in their operations took "rigorous protective actions to further prevent mercury-bearing waste discharges" before Hickle sent his wire.

Du Pont has filed a suit against Matador Chemical for damages to its Sabine River Works at Orange, N.J. Du Pont says the damage was caused by an explosion at Matador in Feb. '69. The charge is that Matador was using extra-hazardous and highly explosive materials or was highly negligent. Du Pont says the explosion caused a power loss at its Sabine Works, a crash shutdown that shortened life of equipment and a loss in production.

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