PCB oozing into nation's waters: EPA

By KARL GROSSMAN

Some 100 million pounds of PCB's are buried in landfill sites across the U.S. and the toxic chemical is reaching into the groundwater and into waterways, an official of the U.S. Environmental Agency told a hearing on Long Island yesterday.

"We're *not* going to solve this problem next week or next year. We'll be very fortunate to clear PCB's out of the environment in 50 years," said Richard Flye, chief of the water enforcement branch for the New York regional EPA office.



K. Saito

Flye spoke at a hearing in Hauppauge sponsored by Rep. Thomas A. Downey of West Islip, who is calling for an outright ban on manufacture and use of PCB's as well as passage of a *Toxic Substance Control Act*, pending in Congress for six years, to control PCB's and other toxic chemicals.

Also speaking at yesterday's session was Koriahi Saito, in charge of the chemical industry in Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry when, in 1972 — after seven deaths and injuries caused by PCB's — the chemical was barred in Japan.

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SAITO TOLD A GROUP of 50, mostly environmentalists, at the hearing that the Japanese had no trouble promptly putting into use substitutes for PCB's.

Mervin First, president of Interonics, a Bay Shore company which uses PCB's in making filters and capacitors also spoke at the hearing and said that his firm was "looking to phase out" PCB's "wherever we can" and declared the "big problem" is the huge amount of "PCB's-laden materials" now in waste disposal sites emitting PCB's.

Flye explained that PCB's have been manufactured solely in the U.S. since 1929 by the Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co. of St. Louis. They've been used in a wide variety of items — particularly as insulating fluid in the little round capacitors placed in flourescent light fixtures and for transformers.

In the 1960s, "when it became clear this material was causing serious environmental problems," said Flye, Monsanto agreed to stop furnishing it for several uses but kept producing it for capacitors and transformers.

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THE THEORY, SAID Flye, was that capacitors and transformers are "theoretically sealed, but wear out," Flye noted, and in a garbage dump they rust away and the PCB's inside "leach out."

He stressed that PCB's — polychlorinated biphenyls — "are a toxic substance" and are "suspected of causing cancer in human beings." Their effect is cumulative and they do not degrade in the environment.

Flye said serious PCB's pollution found in recent years in the Great Lakes and the Hudson River induced the government to stop trying to simply "jawbone" Monsanto into limiting who it supplies but in beginning to take some steps overall against PCB's.

But, he said, PCB's "are not as much a problem as they are a symtom of a problem." He said the chemical is just one of "1,000 odd new chemicals compounded each year" in America without "any screening to their toxicity."

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HE SAID THE EPA HAD very limited power over doing much on PBC's or other toxic chemicals and he said passage of the Toxic Substances Control Act for "pre-screening of industrial chemicals" was a key.

Meanwhile, he said, the EPA has found PCB's to be "ubiquitous" in environments where they have been dumped, such as the Hudson River, and the huge amounts *now leaching from landfills* gives the chemical the quality of a buried time bomb for U.S. residents.

Saito said Japan started producing PCB's in 1954 and banned manufacturer and use of *the chemical*

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in a more family-like atmosphere," he said.

PCB reported polluting U.S. water supply

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after a 1968 incident in which "a pipe used in the processing of manufacturing rice oil, through which PCB's flowed, accidentally came to have a crack and caused a portion of PCB's to leak into the rice oil." Ten people died, and 1,000 "were affected" in the poisoning.

As for substitutes, he said that in Japan mineral oil derivatives, among other chemicals, were used instead of PCB's.

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..."AS A RESULT OF OUR efforts, the pollution of the environment by PCB's have been ameliorated but still PCB's are persistently found in the waters of many rivers, said Seito. "Judging from our experience with PCB's, it is obvious that we have to be careful and cautious in introducing chemical substances into commercial usages."

Japan now sets a limit of 2 parts per million as the amount of PCB's in food that can be tolerated safely. The U.S., says Flye, limits the amount to 5 parts per million.

George Wilde, president of the Marine Resources Council of Long Island, pressed Flye on "what can be done to stop big industry from polluting our environment? We know about PCB's, we know what they do, where can pressure be put to stop it."

Flye conceded that "government doesn't always have the power to do the right thing, doesn't always do the right thing when it has the power. That's a fact of life." He recommended pressure on Congress for passage of the Toxic Substances Control Act and on his agency to take steps against PCB's with what powers it already has to deal with toxic chemicals.

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BOB RANCE OF MASSAPEQUA, president of Save Our Stripers, testified that striped bass — because they spawn in the Hudson where PCB's have long been dumped, 30 pounds a day by one General Electric plant for many years — have been hit hard by PCB's contamination.

"I personally have given up eating striped bass," said Rance. "It would seem like eating these fish is playing Russian Roulette at odds I don't like. Let's face it: we're being poisoned by PCB's and it's a question of at what rate and how long before our bodies react."

Flye said that after studying the effect of PCB's on striped bass in his position with EPA, he also has given up eating the fish.

Marvin First, the president of the Long Island firm which uses PCB's, said that the substance only goes into "hermetically sealed parts and it's not going to leak out unless placed in a disposal."

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