Sangamo, EPA reach PCB settlement

By TOM PRIDDY
News staff writer

ATLANTA — The Sangamo Electric Co. agreed Wednesday to completely stop using and discharging PCBs by Nov. 1, 1977.

At the same time the company was given a temporary relaxation of current PCB discharge limitations.

Sangamo officials also agreed to drop a suit that challenged the right of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to dictate the PCB limits.

The compromise agreement was reached during a lengthy closed-door meeting between officials from Sangamo, EPA and the state Department of Health and Environmental Control.

EPA regional administrator Jack E. Ravan said the settlement is a significant step toward ending the PCB pollution problem in Lake Hartwell.

The Pickens Company was to have reduced levels of the toxic chemical to one part per billion in its wastewater discharge by Oct. 2, according to an EPA order.

Figures released Wednesday show the company has not reached that goal, but no immediate action was taken to force compliance.

Ravan said legal compliance proceedings could drag on for months without any significant progress being made in stopping the PCB problem.

"I know that this cleanup is faster than any I could get any other way," Ravan said.

According to law, EPA could have sought to close down the plant for violating federal wastewater discharge laws.

But Ravan told Sangamo officials that would have been a last resort.

"There is no desire to see your facility closed," Ravan said. "We appreciate what you mean to that area," he said of the 900-employee plant.

"We are not in the business of putting industries out of business. We are in the business of protecting the environment," Ravan said.

The administrator added the agreement is the best available means of protecting Lake Hartwell from future PCB pollution.

Sangamo vice president J.C. Hydrick signed the two-page agreement with EPA and DHEC, including what Ravan said were "very stringent conditions."

In addition to the zero PCB level by Nov. 1, 1977, the company also agreed to a new set of limits that take effect Friday.

At that time the PCB discharge into a Lake Hartwell tributary can average no more than one-fourth of an ounce per day over a 30-day period.

Ravan said this roughly equals 1.7 to 1.8 parts per billion.

The company can discharge no more than one ounce of the chemical on any given day.

Sangamo has until April 1, 1977 to reach the PCB

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level of one part per billion or one-sixth of an ounce which it was to have achieved two weeks ago.

The company will drop the law suit it filed that charged EPA was "arbitrary and capricious" in setting the original one part per billion limit.

Ravan said the plant's PCB discharge is "decreasing significantly."

Latest EPA data show PCB levels in the discharge have been as low as 7.9 parts per billion on Oct. 7 and 8. Hydrick said he expects later figures to be even lower.

"We think Sangamo has made a good faith effort to clean up the discharge," Ravan said.

The November 1977 date for eliminating PCBs from use is roughly the same date the PCB manufacturer, The Monsanto Corp., has set as its last sales of the chemical.

EPA officials said a two-month-old warning still stands against eating fish taken from the lake. High levels of PCBs were found in fish taken from there earlier this year.

New fish samples are being analyzed, and an update on the warning may be made later this week or early next week.

MONS 031852