Industries ask delay of PCB rules

By JOHN CONLOW
News correspondent

WASHINGTON — Several major industries have asked the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to postpone regulations designed to restrict discharges of polyclorinated biphenyls (PCB) into the environment.

The firms include General Motors, Ford Motor Co., Edison Electric and General Electric among others. They contend the proposed standards are unrealistic and costly.

High concentrations of PCBs have recently turned up in Lake Hartwell.

Although Congress has passed a bill, the Toxic Substances Control Act, that would ban the use of PCBs completely after two years with only minor exceptions, the bill has not yet been signed by the President.

Even if the bill is approved by the President, however, there is concern that steps will have to be taken to ensure that existing PCBs are disposed of properly to avoid further environmental contamination.

PCBs are virtually indestructable, biodegradeable only over long periods of time and are thought to remain in the environment well over 25 years.

Recent studies conducted by private research groups and others have found that PCBs cause cancer in test animals.

And they have turned up in virtually every major waterway throughout the U.S. as well as in the milk of nursing mothers in 13 states, including South Carolina.

After a two-year court battle with the Environmental Defense Fund, EPA in July proposed regulations to restrict discharges of PCBs into navigable waters.

EPA DIRECTOR TO RULE ON PCB'S

Hearings on the proposed regulations began late last month and are expected to continue through the end of this year. EPA Administrator Russell Train is slated to rule on the regulations in January.

Train must sort out a number of key issues. They include:

—To what extent "economic" considerations should determine the level of permissible PCB discharges.

—And at what level to set allowable concentrations of PCBs in the nations water supply.

The Environmental Defense Fund points out that EPA itself has admitted "it is virtually impossible to state with confidence" that PCB levels "above zero" are safe for the human body.

The Washington-based group has argued that the Water Pollution Control Act requires EPA to ensure an "ample margin of safety" in setting the proposed standards.

But in a recent development, a large number of major corporations have asked EPA to postpone issuing the regulations until further studies are conducted.

Two firms, Monsanto, currently the only U.S. manufacturer of PCBs, and Dow Chemical Co., are marketing substitutes they contend are an environmentally safe and viable substitute for PCBs.

But Edison Electric told an administrative law judge here that businesses "need EPA assurance" that the substitutes are safe.

Other industry officials called on EPA to postpone its standards while an assessment of the operating expense of introducing the substitutes is made.

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