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Ford signs bill banning use of PCBs

The toxic substances control act, requiring health testing of all new chemicals and banning the use of PCBs, was signed into law Tuesday by President Ford.

The act, long sought by environmentalists, authorizes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to block or limit marketing of new chemical products judged harmful and to ban or limit the continued marketing of such substances.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are to be banned in two years under the law.

PCBs, linked to a variety of human ailments and cancer in laboratory animals, have severely contaminated the Hudson River as the result of discharges from the General Electric Company's Fort Edward and Hudson Falls capacitor manufacturing plants.

The new law is not expected to affect GE operations, however, since the company agreed last month to halt the use of PCBs next year.

In addition, the Monsanto Chemical Company, sole U.S. PCB manufacturer, has announced it will end PCB production next year.

State Environmental Conservation Commissioner Peter A.A. Berle Tuesday termed the new law "a helpful step in the right direction. I think it should help alleviate future problems with these chemicals, although I don't think it will do a great deal in terms of dealing with existing problems."

Berle said problems such as PCB contamination of the Hudson River and the contamination of Lake Ontario with the pesticide Mirex may be avoided in the future if the new law is "aggressively" administered.

Ford also signed bills:

—Continuing a resolution to provide interim financing for certain health and education programs under the departments of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare and related agencies.

—Providing supplemental 1977 funding of $67.1 million for certain programs administered by the Treasury and the Agriculture Department.

—Amending the Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act to provide $17.2 million for the Department of Transportation. The money will help fund up to three pipeline safety inspectors per state.

—Authorizing $816.7 million during 1977 for the National Science Foundation; establishing an experimental $8.3[illegible] million "science for citizens" program to promote understanding of science and technology, and $4 million for schools to plan minority centers for graduate education in science and engineering.

—Providing $11.78 million for the Transportation Department to aid in the safe transportation of hazardous materials.

—Containing fiscal 1976 and transition-quarter funds for the EPA; providing cost-of-living adjustments in retirement pay for federal judges in the Canal Zone, Guam and the Virgin Islands, and authorizing $28.4 million for the National Transportation Safety Board through fiscal 1978.

During the past decade a growing number of commercial chemicals have been banned or restricted, largely at the prodding of federal courts which were petitioned by citizens' groups.

Most have been commercial poisons, such as DDT, dieldrin-aldrin, and mercurial compounds.

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