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PCB Limit Approved By House

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LANSING — By a 161-2 vote Tuesday the State House passed a bill sharply restricting the use of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a poisonous industrial chemical that has become a major international pollution problem.

The bill's sponsor, state Rep. David Bonior, D-Mt. Clemens, said he hopes that the overwhelming vote will prompt Senate passage and "encourage federal action banning PCBs."

THE BILL eventually would halt foreign manufacturers' sales of PCBs for uses that state officials say would lead to water pollution. These uses include wax casting in the auto industry, heating systems for apartments and office buildings and factory hydraulic systems.

Bonior's bill will have little effect on the Monsanto Co., the sole U.S. manufacturer of PCBs, because Monsanto already has limited sales voluntarily. Most of its sales are for

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liquid insulators in electric transformers, which are exempt from the bill's provisions.

Monsanto announced Monday that it is phasing out manufacture of PCBs. Most legislators were apparently unaware of this.

In humans, PCBs affect liver function and can cause skin lesions. The chemical interferes with the reproductive processes of many animals, including birds, whose eggs may have defective shells if they consume even tiny amounts.

PCBs have been found in Lake Michigan salmon at levels as high as 20 parts per million, four times the maximum allowed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration if the fish are to be sold.

John Hesse, a state Department of Natural Resources aquatic biologist, said that if the Senate passes the measure and Gov. Milliken signs it into law, PCB levels in fish should begin declining in as little as two years.