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Lawmakers proposing PCB ban in consumer products

By THOMAS C. JACKSON

HARTFORD — An industrial chemical capable of causing severe human health problems may be banned by the General Assembly from consumer products sold in Connecticut after Jan. 1, 1980.

Products containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) would be barred from stores across the state if the measure now before the Legislature's Environment Committee becomes law.

Lawmakers from two coastal communities say they proposed the ban to focus public attention on PCB pollution and prevent the problem from increasing.

PCBs are used in electrical products ranging from flourscent light fixtures to common houshold appliances. The toxic chemical is used as an insulating fluid in capacitors and transformers due to its resistance to fire.

"This is the same thing we went through with DDT," Sen. George Gunther, a sponsor of the measure, said Tuesday. "Nobody paid any attention to it until DDT was a major problem."

While only one Connecticut factory uses PCBs, many products sold in the state contain the contaminant, Gunther said. When dumped in landfills, PCBs leaking from decaying containers and pollute local waters, he said.

Strict regulation of disposal is one amendment the bill's second sponsor, Stamford Rep. Thom Serrani, plans to propose. Labeling of all products containing PCB components is a second step he suggests. The committee must act on the bill by Monday, he said.

Eight Connecticut firms are among 32 New England businesses being questioned about possible PCB use by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Regional EPA officials in Boston said companies on the list are industries which may use PCBs. Federal questionaires were sent to firms in Hartford, Bristol, Waterbury, Winsted, Norwalk, Danbury, Berlin and East Haven.

Other EPA letters went to companies in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Vermont.

High levels of PCBs have been found in striped bass taken from Long Island Sound.

Lower contamination levels have been reported in sediment taken from rivers from across the state and shellfish from along Long Island Sound.

State Health Commissioner Dr. Douglas Lloyd has said striped bass are safe to eat under current federal stadards. These limits are currently being reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

High doses of PCBs have been linked to stillbirth, miscarriage, birth defects, skin disease and other painful symptoms in human beings. Low level PCB doses have reportedly sparked liver cancer in rats and upset reproduction among other laboratory animals.

Once released to the environment, this industrial pollutant persists for decades. In animals like man it accumulates in fatty tissue to concentrations thousands of times the level ingested.

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