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Sangamo meets discharge limit

Reduced work output lowers PCBs

By closing down production in part of its plant for three days, Sangamo Electric co. of Pickens has successfully limited its polychlorinated byphenyl (PCB) discharge into Lake Hartwell, state health officials say, to a level agreed upon by the company and the state health department.

The officials said tests were run daily by Sangamo Oct. 10-Nov. 13, and four times Oct. 18-Nov. 17 by the State Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC). The results were compiled this week.

Tests run during the month by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) still are being evaluated, said Charles Jeter, director of DHEC's Industrial - Agricultural Wastewater Division.

Sangamo agreed Oct. 13 to reduce its PCB discharges into Lake Hartwell to zero by Nov. 1, 1977, using two phases. In the phase ending next March 31, Sangamo agreed never to discharge more than an ounce of PCBs into the lake in one day. Jeter said Sangamo's highest daily report this month was .888 ounces.

The firm also agreed for the first phase to limit discharges so they'll average no more than .38 ounce per day during a 30-day period. Sangamo's average last month was .311, Jeter said.

The first of the four DHEC tests found a higher PCB discharge on Oct. 18 than Sangamo reported for any day of the testing month: .48 ounce. But that still didn't violate the Oct. 13 agreement.

The other tests showed PCB levels of .041 ounce Nov. 5, .178 ounce Nov. 16 and .191 ounce Nov. 17.

To keep discharges of the dangerous chemical below one-quarter of an ounce per day, the company closed down the etching and forming room for three days, Sangamo attorney Lewis Smoak said this morning.

"It meant those days lost production from that area of the plant," Smoak said, "but no one was thrown out of work because those people were transferred to other jobs for that period."

Smoak said Sangamo found a possible source of earlier higher levels of PCB pollution in a chlorine-contact box designed to neutralize other industrial pollutants as they leave the plant. After the box was bypassed on Nov. 5, discharges of PCBs dropped to one-tenth of an ounce, well below the agreed upon level, and have remained there since, the attorney said.

Smoak said he felt the company would "have no problem" meeting the November 1977 date after which PCB discharges are to cease entirely.

PCBs have caused acne-like skin rashes in humans, and in animals have caused stomach damage such as ulcers, liver damage and, in long dosage periods, cancer.

Sangamo uses PCBs in making electrical capacitors partly because they are durable and withstand heat. But in your body, they collect in the fatty tissues and generally never disintegrate.

The U. S. Food and Drug Administration in 1973 set limits on the safe level of PCBs in food, including a limit of five parts per million (PPM) in fish. That is the highest level found in any fish on the Georgia side of Lake Hartwell

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PCBs

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But on the South Carolina side, fish caught in the 12 Mile Creek area just downstream from Sangamo have contained 202 ppm. Thus in August, DHEC and EPA warned that fish caught on the South Carolina side shouldn't be eaten. On Oct. 22, EPA lifted the warning from the Tugaloo River arm and the lakes main body, but kept it for the Seneca River and Twenty Six Mile Creek.

Jeter said that advisory won't be reconsidered before the end of January.

The original pollution threats dragged lake activity to a standstill, but has picked back up since then. Nevertheless, a lawsuit by the Anderson Firm of Anderson, Kenyon and Epps still asks Sangamo and the Monsanto Company, which makes PCBs, to pay $1 billion in damages to the class of businesses and property owners near the lake.

Sangamo and Monsanto have denied allegations that they damaged those people and have asked that the lawsuit be dismissed. The U.S. District Court in Greenville hasn't ruled on that motion.

Sangamo also filed a lawsuit challenging EPA's right to order Sangamo to clean up its wastewater discharges. But the firm agreed to drop that suit in the same Oct. 31 agreement to limit PCB discharges.

Next April, that agreement will require Sangamo to lower its one-day limit from the present ounce to two-thirds of an ounce. And it must shrink its 30-day limit from the present one-fourth ounce daily average to an average of one-sixth ounce a day.

Monsanto has announced it will quit manufacturing PCBs after Oct. 31. The next day, Sangamo has agreed, it will reduce its PCB discharges to zero.

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