Are PCB's prohibited because they affect the environment ?

Hilversum -- It looks very probable that the use of polychlorbiphenyls (PCB's) are going to be prohibited in Netherland, because of the danger for the fish-eating birds.

At the end of a detailed discussion concerning those products in the section of the environmental chemistry of the Royal Dutch Chemical Association, Mr.Hartogensis, inspector of the hygiene of the environment of the Ministry of Public Health, said, that he was convinced of the desirability of such a prohibition. This were only his personal thoughts, because he wasn't allowed to make pronouncements with political consequences.

A prohibition of PCB's would provisionally involve liftings for applications where those products cannot be replaced by less dangerous ones. Since decades PCB's are used in the electrical industry such as big transformers and condensators where their fire resistant and isolating qualities can hardly be missed.

But this use is relatively innocent because it is used in isolated closed systems and not necessarely have to come in the environment. The problem is different in applications such as plasticiser in synthetics, shipbuilding and glues.

Only in 1966 PCB's were discovered in bodies of - some dead ones -birds, together with DDT and other insecticides with which they are chemically closely related.

If PCB's are effectively prohibited, except for a few exceptions, they would fall under one and the same regulation as DDT, which use is only admitted in some applications in Holland.

In Sweden a similar PCB-prohibition came into force since 2 months.

A.B.) In the PCB-problem a remarkable situation arose, namely that an industry took measurements before the State did. The American manufacturer, Monsanto, stopped delivering these products to the synthetic and paint industry, and this on a voluntary basis, which made the company lose 25 M $/year. They continue delivering to producers of electrical appliances, provided that one takes care of the fact that the dangerous liquid is destroyed after dismission of these appliances - and this on Monsanto's cost.

Other manufacturers of PCB's in Wester-Europe especially Bayer and the French Progil, didn't follow the example of Monsanto.

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During the meeting, a representative of Progil said that his company will take a decision concerning the sale of PCB's towards the end of 1972. This manufacturer will perhaps switch over to lower chlorinated PCB's, which are less dangerous.

As to Holland, one expects that the Government will feel obliged to prohibit PCB's, with the exception of some uses, for which one has to have the authorisation. This happens already for the use of DDT. The problem is that, when the PCB's are prohibited, one will have to look for replacements, of which in some cases one doesn't also know if they pollute the environment.

Prof. van Genderen's opinion is that the company, which sells new products, has to know if they involve environmental problems.

The off-takers can require from the producer that he informs his customer about this. One is also pleading for the fact that for their authorisation, the same conditions are respected as for the food. This is so important because second-hand PCB's, coming from closed electrical systems, are brought on the market, and sold for further use. This PCB appears to be more poisonous then the PCB in his pure form.