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Testimony on PCBs is sharply different

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Banning the use of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) was described Friday by electrical and paper industries as hazardous to economic health.

But a University of Wisconsin professor said levels of the toxic industrial chemicals are building up in human beings and some of the food they eat.

A federal official said an outright ban is essential if PCBs in the environment are to be reduced.

The sharply differing attitudes toward controlling long-lasting and potentially harmful pollutants surfaced in testimony before the Assembly Environmental Quality Committee on a bill by Rep. Mary Lou Munda, D-Madison.

Her measure would prohibit the sale, manufacture or use of the controversial chemical in Wisconsin after Feb. 1, 1977.

"You have to cut off the source," Karl Bremer, an official of the Environmental Protection Agency's Chicago office, testified.

"The front-end approach (banning PCBs altogether) is a practical approach in dealing with the PCB problem," he said.

That would mean that nobody could turn on a fluorescent light, refrigerator or television set because all have components that now contain PCBs, N. Ray Clark of Bridgeport, Conn., argued.

Mrs. Munda introduced the bill at the request of the Natural Resources Board.

She said one of her main concerns is the effect PCBs might have on Lake Michigan's commercial fishery.

Lake trout, coho salmon and chubs caught in the Great Lakes have contained levels of PCBs exceeding the Food and Drug Administration's recommended tolerance limit of five parts per million, Bremer said.