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Abandoning PCB Will Be Costly

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (UPI) — The coal industry says the $3 million cost of abandoning a cancer-causing lubricant commonly used on mine machinery probably will wind up in the lap of consumers.

Starting in February, the substance, known as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) officially is banned.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the coal and power industries together must shell out $49 million to convert to new materials. PCB, considered by the federal agency as a cause of cancer and nerve damage in animals, must be phased out totally in mining machinery by 1981.

An EPA official, Robin Wood, said daily fines of $25,000 will be imposed on violators.

"It's shown up everywhere from ice in the Arctic to mother's milk in a dozen states," she said.

"Industries used to dump old PCB in the waterways and it was dispersed in the air. It also made its way into the food chain. There's just no way to get rid of it."

Enforcement will be aided by the Mining Safety and Health Administration, another federal agency.

"We use PCB extensively in both surface and deep mining," noted Herk Hamm of Consolidated Coal Co. "We're looking at all ways we can meet this problem."

"I say the coal industry will have to acquiesce pretty hard to fit the new regulations," offered Charles Jones, part owner of Amherst Coal Co.

"The problem is going to be getting the public to pay for them. How much more expense from complying with new laws can we absorb?"

The EPA believes that more than 1.25 billion pounds of the chemical have been used by industry since Monsanto Co. first produced it in the early 1920s.

From that amount, at least 750 million pounds are still in use, six million pounds have been incinerated, and the rest has been dispersed in the environment.

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DEC 28 1979

PCB Ban Costly For Coal Industry

By STEVE MULLINS
Of The Daily Mail Staff

A ban on a cancer-causing lubricant widely used in mining machinery and electrical transformers could cost the coal industry more than $3 million, an Environmental Protection Agency official said Wednesday.

The EPA ban, effective in February, will forbid the use of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), which has been used for 60 years as a lubricant and coolant in continuous miners, loading machines and other mining equipment. EPA officials said the viscous fluid was accepted widely because it has a very high heat tolerance necessary for use in coal mines.

The coal and power industries combined can plan on spending more than $49 million to convert to new materials, said Robin Woods of the EPA public information office. The ban will carry fines of up to $25,000 a day for noncompliance under the Toxic Substance Control Act. EPA officials said they expect the Mining Safety and Health Administration to assist with enforcement.

Spokesmen for some of the state's larger coal companies have said they plan on complying with the new regulations, but the cost probably will be passed on to the public.

Charles Jones, part-owner of Amherst Coal Co., said his company, "like most others, has been using the PCB oil for years. I say the coal industry will have to acquiesce pretty hard to fit the new regulations. The problem is going to be getting the public to pay for them. How much more expense from complying with new laws can we absorb?"

Consolidated Coal Co. spokesman Herk Hamm said his company is "working on the problem. We use PCB extensively in both surface and deep mining. We're looking at all the ways we can meet this problem."

As early as 1972 the substance was found to cause cancer and nerve damage in laboratory animals. Furthermore, EPA officials said they found that there was no effective way to dispose of PCB. "The only way we can get rid of it is to incinerate it," said one agency spokesman.

The EPA estimates that since the Monsanto Co. first produced PCB in the early 1920s, more than 1.25 billion pounds of the toxic substance has been used by industry. At least 750 million pounds is still in use and 6 million pounds has been incinerated. The rest has been dispersed in the environment.

"It's shown up everywhere from ice in the Arctic to mothers' milk in a dozen states," Ms. Wood said. "Industries used to dump old PCB in the waterways and it was dispersed in the air. It also made its way into the food chain. There's just no way to get rid of it."

PCB, which has been sold under the trade names Askarel and Pyronal, must be totally out of use in mining machinery by 1981 under proposed revisions in the law. Presently, coal companies are required to store the fluid in specially constructed drums. There are two disposal stations in the country — in Houston, Texas, and Bridgeport, N.J. Neither has been approved by the EPA.

Electrical transformers containing the substance may remain in use until they wear out, EPA Environmental Engineer Hal Snyder said. "They can stay up as long as they don't require maintenance because they are safe containers as long as people aren't working on them. We're trying to avoid premature retirement of equipment when possible.

"This is no scare story," Snyder said. "We just want to keep the PCB out of the environment." He said several West Virginia-based mine companies already have begun converting to other types of lubricants, such as mineral or silicone oils.

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