Montgomery Advertiser
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OCT 1 9 1976

PCBs Pose No Threat, Says Dr. Myers

By BOB LOWRY
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PCB pollution in the state is so scant that it does not pose a threat to human health, although the Alabama Water Improvement Commission will continue to monitor the potentially dangerous pollutant, State Health Officer Dr. Ira Myers said Monday.

"I've concluded that we do not have a significant health issue upon which we should take action," Myers said at a meeting of the AWIC Monday.

He said PCBs are "going to be with us for some time because of their persistence in the environment and the way they multiply in the food chain.

PCBs pollution in Alabama came to light recently when Georgia closed its portion of the Coosa River to commercial fishing because of high concentration of PCBs pollution from a General Electric plant in Rome, Ga.

The AWIC, the State Health Department and the State Conservation Department conducted tests on the Coosa River in Alabama, but determined the pollution level was too low to justify closing the river.

"It would have been confusing to the public and caused a problem with commercial fishermen," said Myers. "I think we were justified in not taking any action."

PCB is an abbreviation for polychlorinated biphenyls, an organic compound used in the manufacture of transformers and capacitors.

The AWIC said Monday it would conduct tests again this week, starting Wednesday, for PCB content in water samples and fish taken from Weiss Lake on the upper Coosa.

The commission also said Monday it had found "very low PCB levels" in samples taken from Choccolocco Creek and Logan Martin Lake.

There was some concern that a PCB manfacturing facility operated up until 1971 in Anniston by the Monsanto Co. may have contributed to a high PCB levelin those areas.

In other action Monday, the commission turned over to Atty. Gen. Bill Baxley's office a case involving pollution near a Louisville and Nashville Railroad yard in Birmingham.

Commissioa staff member Charles Horn said the L&N Boyles Yard is dumping oil and grease into a tributary of Five Mile Creek without a permit.

In other enforcement matters, the commission gave Phelps Dodge Brass Co., Lee Brothers Division in Anniston 30 days to complete a water treatment system approved last year and to connect their sanitation system to the city's.

Vulcan Asphalt Refining Co. of Cordova was ordered to complete by next spring a pollution abatement plant approved earlier by the commission.

Industrial permits were issued for 19 industries, including two in Montgomery. They were the Alaga Whitfield Foods, Inc., for the pretreatment and discharge of pickle manufacturing waste, and the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad for the treatment and discharge of wastes from its railyard operations to an unnamed tributary of the Alabama River.

The commission also approved industrial waste proposals for five new industries, including the Sony Corp. plant in Dothan.

Baxley's office has been asked for an opinion on whether the commission can spend fine monies or previously earned funds without a specific appropriation from the Alabama Legislature.

The opinion is being sought in connection with the possible establishment by the commission of a field office in Mobile.

MONS 050834