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Editorials:

Power To Stop Pollution

While the sovereign state and Old Dominion of Virginia has the authority to close down all fishing on the James River and its tributaries below Hopewell because the pesticide-chemical Kepone has been found to be lethally thick in the water, the United States Government must ASK the one manufacturer of another poison which kills fish and perhaps people to stop selling it.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Russell Train had to go hat in hand to the Monsanto Co. and beg that it stop making polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) which are heat-but-not-electricity conductors used as insulators for transformers and capacitors. And at the same time to ask utilities and railroads that use PCBs to quit dumping them in streams and on land after use, since they are known to cause skin disease, liver ailments and other problems.

Train has no other weapon to use but requests and publicity, and he will meet with representatives of the manufacturer and utilities in January to plead his case in greater detail.

The Toxic Substances Act, which would give him power to halt PCB production forthwith, lies languishing in the committees of both House and Senate, where it has been for five long years.

And the PCBs have, after all, been manufactured since 1929. There have been 700 million pounds of them produced in that time, of which 300 million pounds are estimated to be still in use.

EPA wants regulations to cover dangerous health-destroying chemicals, like the Kepone that had gone into the James before Life Science Products Co. closed down last summer — and some 300 other chemicals it knows or has reason to suspect are similarly dangerous.

Chemical combinations and new discoveries have been coming so thick and fast that it seems almost impossible to keep up with them, let alone to know what their long-term damage to human, fish or animal species may be. It is the tiniest first step the Congress could take to cope with the situation to pass the pending legislation early in 1976. The chemical threat to human survival these days is hardly less than the nuclear threat.

Further, in our view there should be companion legislation absolutely banning the production and sale of potentially dangerous chemicals in the future until they have been thoroughly studied and tested, no matter who is standing impatiently by with his money in hand waiting to put them to use.

There are poisons aplenty already around us (PCBs in the water since 1929, for one) without letting still more go unchecked until we are getting Thalidomide scares every day.

Enough is enough, and Virginia's wiped-out fisheries ought to be the last straw, pointing out that we have reached the limit of blindly hoping each new chemical invention is good and good for us.

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