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Chemetron Seeks Use Of Chemical

LANSING (UPI) — Three western Michigan companies which manufacture and use a suspected cancer-causing chemical called DCB are seeking an exemption from legislation curtailing its use.

Representatives of the three companies met Tuesday with the House Marine Affairs Committee, which already had approved a bill regulating the use of the industrial chemical PCB and related compounds, to persuade lawmakers to exempt the second chemical from the legislation.

Chairman David Bonior, D-Mount Clemens, said he would hold off action on the legislation to resolve the dispute. The three companies are Lakeway Chemicals Inc. of Muskegon, Chemetron Corp of Holland, and Eastshore Chemical Co. of Muskegon.

Lakeway manufacturers millions of pounds each year of dichlorobenzidine (DCB) which is used extensively in pigments and dyes. The other two companies use it.

The legislation now before the House, which would give the DNR power to regulate the use of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) and eventually outlaw its use in all forms except closed electrical system, could be interpreted also to ban DCB, the industry spokesmen said.

"It could mean millions of dollars worth of business lost of Michigan industry," said Joseph Sandri, vice president of Lakeway Chemicals.

The Department of Natural Resources is testing fish from the Big Black Creek which flows by the Lakeway plant to determine whether DCB has infiltrated into the environment.

There is no scientic evidence that the chemical is actually present in the environment, but DNR experts said it is very similar to PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl), which has been found in alarming levels in Lake Michigan fish.

"We don't know what happens to it (DCB) in the environment," said DNR toxic substances expert John Hesse.

The presence of PCB in fish and animals that eat fish, such as mink and birds, has sparked concern across the nation, reminiscient of the DDT and mercury pollution scares of past years.

Lakeway has a record of water pollution problems since 1973 and has been the cause of numerous citizen complaints. One DNR report said discharges from the plant have resulted in a three-foot-thick sludge in the Big Black Creek.

Bonior said he would probably support amendments to the legislation that would exempt DCB but would grant the DNR power to implement controls later if it is determined that the chemical is in fact hazardous to human health.

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