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-- FYI

technology newsletter

Environmental groups call for limiting use of PCB

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) are in the spotlight again. The Lake Michigan Toxic Substances Committee, an interstate advisory group to the Environmental Protection Agency, recommends that PCB use be limited, although it doesn't seem to be able to come up with an alternative for transformers and capacitors. Monsanto, sole U.S. manufacturer, says the study tends to support what the company is already doing—limiting sales to insulating fluids or hermetically sealed devices. EPA sources indicate some PCB is entering the U.S. from foreign suppliers for coatings, hydraulic fluids for mining equipment and for wax process castings. The committee's concern seems to be about the continuing high level of PCB in lake fish. But Monsanto says that's not surprising because it would be many years before the effect of PCB use limitations are felt on fish and wildlife. That answer hasn't satisfied the Michigan Natural Resources Council, which is recommending to the state legislature a complete ban on PCB. Such a ban would severely restrict electrical power distribution, say utility sources. Reason: no materials have shown the all-round coating, heat-transfer and fire-resistance properties of PCB. But Dow thinks it may be near marketing a viable alternative. After five years of research the company is promoting its polydimethyl siloxane for use as a transformer fluid.

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