The Evansville Press
EVANSVILLE, IND.
D. 45,093

SEP 30 1976

Ford gets chemicals bill

By Ann McFeatters
Scripps-Howard Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON — One of the most important bills President Ford is expected to sign in the next few days is a bitterly fought measure to control hazardous new chemicals.

About 20,000 chemicals already are being used industrially and 1000 new ones are being introduced each year. The government has no idea what they are or how safe they are. Any company may sell a new chemical without any test of its safety.

For six years Congress has considered proposals for control of toxic substances. Twice it came close to passing a bill, but, because of intense lobbying by chemical companies as well as environmentalists, Congress was unable to agree on a compromise in either instance.

This year brought public scares over PCBs, chemical compounds used for their resistance to heat, and Kepone, a pesticide that is slow to break down in nature. Kepone and PCBs, extremely toxic, are widespread in the environment and definitely pose a human health hazard. These scares generated enough heat to force a compromise.

The industry finally decided it would have to live with government regulations. Congress was under pressure from scientific estimates that 1 out of 4 Americans will get cancer and that 60 to 90 per cent of all human cancer is caused by environmental factors including chemicals.

Two weeks ago the House and Senate got together and voted a bill that both environmentalists and the chemical industry accepted. The resulting law, when signed by Ford, may help prevent thousands of Americans from contracting cancer, giving birth to deformed children or developing health problems such as respiratory illness and neurological damage.

It could also prevent damage to the environment such as polluted waterways and dead wildlife.

It gives the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) authority it has long wanted to keep potentially dangerous chemicals off the market.

Under its provisions manufacturers have to notify EPA 90 days before marketing a new chemical. EPA has an additional 90 days if necessary to investigate the chemical. If EPA is not satisfied the chemical is safe, it can order the manufacturer not to market it. If the manufacturer objects, EPA can ask for a court injunction to stop or limit production until testing and evaluation are completed.

The bill directs the EPA to take steps immediately to insure that all manufacture and distribution of PCBs is stopped within two years. In Japan, hundreds of people who ate rice contaminated with PCBs suffered loss of eyesight, facial disfigurement and neurological disorders. In this country PCBs have been found recently in fish and in the milk of mothers nursing babies.

The PCBs ban will displease a lot of industries because they lack an acceptable substitute to put into their products. But the only U.S. maker of PCBs, [redacted] Co., has promised to stop production by the end of 1977.

MONS 046880