Virginia banned fishing in the James River in December after high levels of Kepone were found in fish.

Life Science (Hopewell, Va.) was the sole maker of Kepone when toxic effects on employees led to closing of the plant in August 1975.

The firm obtained raw materials for the chemical from Allied and Hooker and supplied the finished pesticide under contract to Allied. Life Science employees allegedly injured by the chemical previously filed a $29.1-million lawsuit (*CW, Jan. 7, p. 13*).

The fishermen's suit contends that Kepone has destroyed the market for any seafood from the James River and its tributaries, causing economic losses and damages to the plaintiffs. It also alleges that Allied and Moore, at various times between 1951 and 1973, allowed Kepone waste to enter the river, where a gradual buildup of excessive chlorinated hydrocarbons affected all marine life.

Virginia Governor Mills E. Godwin, Jr., says Allied intends to help finance cooperative medical and research programs to minimize the effects of Kepone on persons exposed to the chemical and on the environment.

Suit targets Bechtel

A Justice Dept. suit against Bechtel Corp. appears to be the first attempt to apply the Sherman Antitrust Act to the sticky Arab boycott question. The suit filed last week in U.S. District Court in San Francisco charges that the big general contractor, which has several petroleum-related projects in the Mideast, complied with Arab demands that it not subcontract work to firms dealing with Israel. In doing so, Justice claims, Bechtel lessened competition in the export of parts, systems, materials, equipment and services.

Bechtel's response: the U.S. has always stated that "compliance with foreign laws is not illegal under American law," the firm's personnel policy forbids discrimination, and "bidders will be selected in the purchasing process on the basis of compliance with all applicable legal requirements."

Justice wants to get a consent decree forbidding Bechtel to comply with the Arab demands. It also hopes the court will affirm the antitrust allegations. That might bring claims against Bechtel by subcontractors that say they lost out on contracts because of the boycott.

Justice is also investigating practices of about a dozen other big firms.

Trimming auto vapors

The Environmental Protection Agency has proposed new standards to cut evaporative emissions of gasoline from cars and light-duty trucks 90% by the 1979-model year. The agency acted after discovering that its current test for such emissions seriously underestimated their volume.

EPA says the average daily evaporation of gasoline from carburetors, gas tanks and other car parts now slightly exceeds the hydrocarbons released through tailpipes.

The proposed new standards, which EPA believes would add $11 to sticker prices of cars and trucks, would cut evaporative emissions by 65% in the 1978-model year. EPA also approved a new testing procedure designed to measure emission volumes more adequately.

EPA says auto makers should have little trouble meeting the standards. By industry estimates, that means cutting total car hydrocarbon evaporative emissions to 6 grams/hour for 1978 models, 2 grams/hour for 1979 and later models. Donald R. Buist, Ford Motor Co. executive engineer, certification testing, says Ford supports EPA's test. The industry-estimated 1978 target is achievable, he said, but the 1979 level is "technically impossible."

And officials at Ford, General Motors and Chrysler say that unless EPA tests older cars or eliminates background emissions from test requirement measures, even 1978 standards cannot be met.

Controlling evaporative emissions from other sources in autos will mean sealing fuel systems and air intake systems from the atmosphere, Buist says. "We'll vent gas tank and air cleaner vapors into a charcoal cannister, where they'll be stored until the engine is started. Then those vapors will be burned," he explains.

Most autos already have the cannisters to meet less-strict evaporative emission standards set in California and in earlier EPA requirements.

More plastics for autos

The economy cars that U.S. auto manufacturers featured so heavily at their exhibits in the International Auto Show in New York's Coliseum last week clearly reflect the growing trend to use of lighter materials. While the 1976 cars are generally smaller, and consequently require less material per unit than larger U.S. cars, more models contain these materials this year and are creating a bigger market for plastics.

A prime example of the switch to lightweight materials is Chevrolet's Chevette Rally, which drew a lot of attention at the show because of the 39-mile-per-gallon results it scored in the Environmental Protection Agency's mileage tests. The car's construction requires 75-80 lbs. of plastic, mainly in the interior, including 12-16 lbs. of polypropylene. Its instrument panel is made of acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene and glass.

A material that gained use in 26 of the 1976 models for its lighter weight and design properties was sheet molding compound. For example, it is used for the front-end panel of the Buick Century. The part is 30% glass fiber and weighs 13 lbs.

The Reinforced Plastics Composites Institute of the Society of the Plastics Industry projects that the trend toward using more reinforced plastic composite will rise in 1976, to 285-318 million lbs., for land transportation, compared with 265 million lbs. in 1975.

Owens-Corning Fiberglas believes that the demand for glass-fiber-reinforced plastics in the transportation industry will increase to 350 million lbs. this year. This is 27% above 1975's estimated 275 million lbs.

The company adds that several new applications set for 1977 models may improve demand for its materials in subsequent years.

PPG Industries, however, notes that over-all demand for glass per car in the auto market appears not to have changed in 1976 from last year.

The company says the average amount of glass used per car in both years totals about 50 sq.ft.

Monsanto drops PCBs

Monsanto, the only U.S. producer of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), is getting out of the business. The company had limited PCB production, now down to 40 million lbs./year, to closed electrical systems—for example, transformers and capacitors.

But it has decided to phase out production entirely because of environmental pressure that has built up.

Electrical equipment producers say that substitute fluids already are available for use in capacitors.

Monsanto is testing some of the substitutes and is understood to be prepared to supply PCBs until alternative materials are ready.

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