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Water Tests Here May Aid Nation

By MILLIE BALL

Results of separate drinking water tests beginning next week in Orleans and Jefferson parishes could help determine the most economically and technologically feasible methods of purifying drinking water, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday.

EPA Administrator Russell E. Train said if the methods tested here and in other parts of the U.S. prove effective in removing contaminants from water, than they could be used as a basis for enforcing drinking water standards all over the country. However, enforcement authority of regulations to be set through the Safe Drinking Water Act "belongs with the states," said Train.

The EPA chief made his comments at a press conference at Braniff Place following an address to the 1976 Society of American Foresters Convention there.

The water studies — one contracted out by the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, and the other being done in-house by the Jefferson Department of Water — will examine the amount of contaminants in this raw water, the amount left in normal purification processing, and the amount remaining after the normal purification process, plus another method. The second method being tested by the S&WB is an activated carbon and ozone system, while the method being tested in Jefferson is a granulated activated carbon system, said Train.

The EPA is now developing standards of maximum concentration levels of organic compounds permissible in drinking water, Train said. The tests, if they work, will help with enforcement, since EPA will be able to prove the purification systems are feasible.

Train also said he is not in favor of all forestry operations being exempted from Section 404 of the Water Pollution Control Act. This section regulates the disposal of dredged material, and, according to Train, a total forestry exemption would leave many hardwood forests in the South unprotected. Without protection, he predicted the hardwood areas could be cut down, and bottomlands filled in to grow soybeans. The hardwood areas are generally believed to be important for wildlife habitat and maintenance of water tables.

During the press conference, Train praised Congress for passing the Toxic Substances Control Act, a Virginia judge for fining Allied Chemical Corp. for discharges of kepone in the St. James River, and Monsanto Corp. for deciding to stop shipping and selling PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls) by October, 1977. PCB's are chlorinated hydrocarbon molecules similar in structure to DDT. Although use has been limited to electrical systems, they have managed to get in the environment, and have had adverse 1 effects on reproductive systems in fish and on liver in primates, Train said.

Since the fate of Mirex, a controversial insecticide used to fight fire ants, is now in the judicial process, and he will have to make the final decision, Train said he really could not comment on whether he believes it should be banned. Some studies have reported it causes cancer in rats.

However, when asked to comment on Gov. Edwin W. Edwards' repeated statement that environmental regulations relating to the production, transportation and use of energy in the country should be restricted or suspended for five years, Train said, "I disagree...That would make energy more important than human life. I don't believe he said that," said Train, who said those setting environmental standards should take energy and business matters into account.

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