PCB file

The Journal of Commerce
AND COMMERCIAL
NEW YORK, MONDAY, MARCH 30, 1981

PCB Pollution Cited

Waukegan Harbor Focus of Cleanup

United Press International

WAUKEGAN, Ill. — The PCB contamination of Waukegan Harbor is a pollution story unlike most others.

No one has filed suit claiming PCBs have destroyed his health.

No one has claimed PCBs put them out of business.

There has been no mass hysteria over the problem — just bad publicity.

"We have one of the most polluted bodies of water in the country," said Mayor Bill Morris. "We've gotten a lot of bad pöblicity and it's had an impact on our image."

Tons of oily polychlorinated biphenyls are mixed in with sediment at the bottom of Waukegan Harbor, dumped their unwittingly over two decades, primarily by the Johnson Outboard Division of Outboard Marine Corp.

The PCBs were used in hydraulic fluid manufactured by Monsanto Corp. between 1963 and 1971.

Hugh Thomas, a spokesman for Outboard Marine, said the company purchased some 8 million pounds of the fluid, which at the time was the standard of the industry.

We don't know how much was PCBs, Mr. Thomas said. Everyone in die casting worries about fire. It just so happens this stuff worked very well in the machines and reduced the danger of fires.

But hydraulic systems leak, and the PCBs got into the water. If we had known we were using PCBs and known what they could do, we would not have used them. We would just as soon they never were there.

It has been estimated as much as 20 percent of the hydraulic fluid leaked out.

The Environmental Protection Agency first discovered the PCB contamination in 1975 and has developed elaborate plans for suction dredging the harbor — a plan that will cost as much as $33 million — to keep the PCBs from migrating into Lake Michigan.

Suction pumps are to be used to move some 275,000 pounds of contaminated harbor bottom to an above-ground storage bin.

EPA Files Suit

The EPA is suing Outboard Marine and Monsanto, accusing the chemical company of failing to warn it about the dangers of PCB use.

We have said all along we are willing to pay our fair share, Mr. Thomas said. But we think Monsanto is more responsible — perhapr totally responsible.

Outboard Marine, which earned $2.8 million in 1979 — already has spent $750,000 trying to get the PCBs out of its equipment, pipes carrying discharges to the harbor were torn out and replaced and its die casting operations were moved to a new building without a direct discharge.

Outboard Marine has not interfered with the cleanup but they are trying to protect their interests, said Mayor Morris, who three years ago began what he called aggressive efforts to get a cleanup of the harbor under way.

They are not stalling but at the same time are not saying blame us, either, Mr. Morris said.

He said the harbor is in dire need of dredging.

Every so many years it must be dredged. If we don't dredge soon, large ore boats won't be able to get through and we can't dredge with the PCBs there, Mr. Morris said.

The harbor was last dredged in 1970.

Most of the PCB contamination — about 80 percent — is concentrated in a small section of the harbor known as Slip No. 3.

The EPA plans to remove the sediments, which are believed to reach as far as eight feet down, PCB concentrations as high as 186,000 parts per million were found one foot down.

The EPA plans to pipe the contaminated sediment into a 30-foot high, clay-lined, above-ground storage bin it will construct on Outboard Marine property.

Mr. Thomas said the EPA has asked to use 25 acres of the company's 160-acre site.

If what they propose is environmentally sound and lawful, we intend to cooperate, Mr. Thomas said. The PCBs are buried now. They are not migrating to the lake. If they are going to be removed, we want them removed well. If they are not, our potential liability will be increased.

Under federal law, Outboard Marine could be fined $20 million.

Mr. Thomas said before Outboard Marine agrees to the dredging operation, the EPA will have to assure the company the effort will not create new health, or other problems.

MONS 011853