

Halt to Using PCB Chemicals Sought by EPA

Agency Asks Firms Utilizing
The Industrial Pollutants
To Cut Back Voluntarily

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter.
WASHINGTON—The Environmental Protection Agency called for an end to the use of certain industrial pollutants known as polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs.

EPA Administrator Russell Train, in urging the ban, asked manufacturers and users of the substance to cut back voluntarily their use, saying that adequate substitutes for the chemicals don't yet exist.

PCBs, a chemical family derived from benzene, are known to cause severe human ailments such as skin disease and liver problems, and laboratory tests with monkeys have shown a high incidence of reproductive failure. They are most commonly used as insulators for transformers and capacitors, and are particularly attractive because of their ability to conduct heat but not electricity. The chemicals work their way into the environment when fluids are replaced in the electrical equipment and PCB-laden residues are dumped into streams and on land. They are also extremely resistant to degradation by natural forces.

The EPA hasn't any authority to order that PCB use be discontinued. However, the EPA can control their discharge into the nation's waterways and Mr. Train said he will seek court injunctions, if necessary, to force industry to stop such practices.

PCBs have been detected at unsafe levels in water and fish particularly in the Great Lakes. Eating fish, Mr. Train said, is the most common mode of entry of PCBs into the body.

"The public has to understand that we have a hell of a problem and nothing this agency can do will solve it for a long time," Mr. Train asserted.

Mr. Train said he will meet in January with representatives of Monsanto Co., the sole U.S. producer of PCBs, as well as 27 manufacturers of transformers and capacitors using the products. He also plans to meet with the heads of major electric utilities and other large capacitor and transformer users, such as railroads, to urge research programs to develop a PCB substitute. He also said federal agencies will be asked to inventory the uses of PCB-containing materials and to develop plans to assure safe disposal of these materials.

Mr. Train said he will urge manufacturers of PCBs and transformers and capacitors to develop safe and environmentally acceptable alternatives to PCBs as rapidly as possible. He also said federal agencies will be asked to inventory the uses of PCB-containing materials and to develop plans to assure safe disposal of these materials.

PCBs have been manufactured since 1899 but it wasn't until early 1973 that a federal interagency task force began to study what should be done about the environmental impact of their use. And the Food and Drug Administration subsequently set tolerance levels for PCBs in several types of food, particularly fish.

Mr. Train took the occasion of his PCB announcement to again urge Congress to pass a Toxic Substances Act, introduced five years ago, that would authorize the EPA to ban toxic chemicals such as PCBs. The bill is still in committee in both houses of Congress.