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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 1976

EPA ISSUES FINAL PCB WATER POLLUTION STANDARDS

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Russell E. Train today announced the issuance of final regulations which totally prohibit the discharge of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into waterways by certain industrial plants.

"As a result of a formal and extensive review of our previous proposals, I have concluded that a total prohibition of direct discharges into the Nation's waters is fully justified," said Train. "PCBs have been shown to be highly toxic, persistent and non-biodegradable. Also, there is reason to believe that PCBs may cause cancer in humans."

"The present problem of PCB contamination in the environment is so severe that in many waters throughout the United States PCB loads are already in excess of the criterion in our proposals, " Train said. "The final regulations being issued today represent significant progress in reducing future contamination of the environment by PCBs."

The regulations were issued under Section 307(a) of the 1972 Water Pollution Control Act. They do not cover indirect

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discharges through municipal sewage treatment plants, which will be dealt with in "pretreatment" regulations now being developed.

The regulations prohibit any discharge of PCBs by manufacturers of PCBs. Plants which use PCBs in the production of electrical transformers and capacitors are subject to a similar discharge prohibition. These industries are the principal specific (or "point") sources of PCB discharges to the Nation's waterways.

Discharges from plants manufacturing electrical equipment have been identified as the source of high levels of PCBs in fish taken from parts of New York's Hudson River. This prompted the State to recommend limits on the consumption of sport fish and to ban commercial fishing in certain areas. Similar controls have been implemented to protect the public from high PCB levels in certain species of fish and Lakes Michigan and Ontario. High PCB levels resulting from discharges from plants manufacturing electrical equipment have been reported in various other rivers and lakes throughout the country.

EPA's standards were developed to protect human health and organisms in the aquatic food chain. Laboratory tests conducted with a wide range of aquatic animals and mammals have demonstrated a variety of toxic effects, including liver damage, tumors and reproductive problems. EPA believes that the standards will provide an ample degree of safety to organisms which are likely to be exposed.

Industries must meet the standards within one year. EPA analysis indicates that affected industries have the technology available to them to comply with the regulations without excessive impact on the economy or on product prices at the consumer level. Most of the affected industries are expected to gradually eliminate their use of PCBs altogether over the next year.

EPA proposed toxic pollutant effluent standards for PCBs in the July 23, 1976 Federal Register. Extensive hearings on the proposals were conducted by EPA during the period August through November 1976, during which much evidence was received on toxicity and the technological and economic feasibility of the proposed regulatory program. Testimony was received from a large number of witnesses, including representatives from both environmental groups and industry.

PCBs are highly mobile and remain present in the environment for many years. They are particularly harmful to aquatic organisms, in which they accumulate in concentrations many times greater than those found in surrounding waters. In

many cases, these large concentrations are then passed up the aquatic food chain to consuming organisms, including man.

About 1.25 billion pounds of PCBs have been used in the United States over the past 45 years. EPA estimates that at least 3,000 pounds of PCBs are discharged to the aquatic environment each year by industries subject to these regulations.

The Agency recognizes that these regulations can address only the problems of future contamination from industrial plant discharges. Past widespread use of the chemicals in the production of lubricant additives, hydraulic and compressor fluid, carbonless copy paper, plasticizers, paints and other products has resulted in PCBs being present throughout the environment. Although most of these uses have now been substantially curtailed, PCBs which have entered the environment cannot, in most cases, be recovered and will require many years to degrade. The public will be alerted to potential hazards by careful long-term monitoring of PCB levels in food.

The promulgation of these standards now completes the performance by the Agency of the first major element of its undertaking to regulate the discharges of toxic pollutants into the Nation's waters under a consent decree entered by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on June 9, 1976. This called upon the Agency to develop and promulgate toxic pollutant effluent standards for six compounds under Section 307(a) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.

"The completion of this phase of our regulatory program substantially within the time frame set forth in the consent decree represents a major step forward in our efforts to control the discharge of toxic pollutants," Administrator Train said. Under the next phase of the decree, the Agency will develop effluent limitations, new source performance standards, and pretreatment standards for 21 major industries with substantial discharges of harmful pollutants. This phase is scheduled for completion by the end of 1979.

EPA's final regulations complement other related government actions taken to reduce human exposure to PCBs. For example, the Food and Drug Administration has established tolerances for PCBs in food and has banned use of the chemicals in processing food and feed. The Department of the Interior has prohibited the use of PCBs in offshore oil operations. Also, EPA has proposed regulations (Federal Register, December 30, 1975) to control spills of numerous identified hazardous substances, including PCBs. In addition, EPA has issued recommended procedures for disposal of PCBs by industrial users (Federal Register, April, 1976). Also, the newly enacted Toxic

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Substances Control Act prohibits the manufacture of PCBs after January 1, 1979 and prohibits all PCB processing and distribution in commerce after June 1, 1979.

The standards will appear soon in the Federal Register.

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