

Ban on PCB, plastic bottles OKd by House

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INDIANAPOLIS — The Indiana House took two environmental leaps Wednesday by being the first legislative body in the nation to ban PCB and plastic bottles.

House Bill (HB) 1207, banning the use of plastic containers for soft drinks and beer, and HB 1353, prohibiting polychlorinated biphenyls (a DDT-type chemical compound) were adopted with little opposition.

State Rep. B. Patrick Bauer, D-South Bend, a teacher and chairman of the Committee on Public Health and Environment, sponsored both bills, which he called "extremely significant."

It's difficult to tell which has more impact — on the environment and on Indiana industries.

Bauer asserted the use of plastic containers for soft drinks, recently authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) after years of prohibition, could cripple the tinning, canning and bottling industries.

At the same time, PCB has been judged so dangerous that U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Russell Train has warned against eating Great Lakes fish daily, said Bauer.

PCB is an oily substance used in electrical devices, such as transformers and generators. It also has been used, in smaller quantities, in the manufacture of paper products, paints and oils.

The most frightening aspect about it, according to the EPA, is its resistance to deterioration and its tendency to multiply when, for example, a worm is eaten by a fish and then by a bigger fish.

Bauer said PCB infestation threatens the entire million-dollar coho fishing industry on Lake Michigan, since EPA has noted the Great Lakes are among the worst areas of PCB contamination. Bloomington, where television components are manufactured, also was listed as a highly polluted PCB area.

The Indiana State Chamber of Commerce and various industries have supported the PCB ban, as has Monsanto, Inc., the only PCB manufacturer in the United States, and the firm has ceased making the compound except for use in closed items, such as insulate transformers, said Bauer.

At the hearing on the PCB bill, spokesmen for the EPA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service encouraged Hoosier legislators to proceed with haste on a PCB ban, since "every effort in every direction" would help.

The PCB ban passed 86-2, with State Rep. John R. Larson, R-Valparaiso, one of the dissenters. Senate Minority Leader Robert J. Fair is listed as one of six Senate cosponsors of the legislation.

Bauer said the ban also would require industries using the compound in elec-

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trical devices to present plans for disposition of PCB, which can be decomposed safely if burned at temperatures in excess of 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit.

State Rep. Gregory S. Reising, D-Gary, who spoke for the PCB bill, said the compound is known as a significant industrial booster, since it's highly resistant to heat — a factor which also makes it difficult to break it down chemically.

Since incidents in Japan, where 1,000 persons were made ill by the effects of PCB in fish, attempts have been made to manufacture adequate substitutes. Bauer reported considerable progress in this area.

However, the problem lies in disposing of 700 million pounds of PCB already in the dumps, river bottoms, the Great Lakes and waterways.

The ban on plastic containers passed 53-38. In the Northwest Indiana delegation, "Nay" votes were cast by Jewell G. Harris, D-Gary; Larson, and Jerome J. Repps, R-Munster.

Bauer stressed the problem of plastic containers isn't immediate, since soft drinks in Indiana are still sold in bottles and cans. Likewise, there are no known plans for distributors to sell beer and malts in plastic bottles.

However, it could be intensified, since Coca-Cola has been experimenting with a new type of plastic container on the East Coast. Bauer reported that by 1980, 10 per cent of carbonated beverages in the nation may be sold in plastic containers.

"That will mean 10 billion trash bottles, a new pollution problem," said Bauer. "Let's stop the problem before it starts."

The FDA issued its authority for the use of plastic containers late in 1975, after years of prohibition because carbonated beverages tend to leech or seep through plastic.

But Bauer reported the FDA reclassified the types of plastic containers and approved one of them for carbonated beverages.

From the environmental standpoint, the plastic containers deserve a ban because their production takes six times more energy than cans and they give out foul and dangerous odors when burned, the South Bend legislator said.

Last Monday, the House agreed to an amendment offered by Reising which would clarify the ban. It provides that no carbonated beverages in containers with less than 90 per cent metal or glass could be sold in Indiana.

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