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House Votes Ban on Output Of PCB's Within 3 Years

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 23—The House voted tonight to ban within three years the manufacture of PCB's, a class of chemical that has been linked to cancer and birth defects, water pollution and the contamination of wildlife.

The action is an amendment to the toxic substances control bill, which would give to the head of the Environmental Protection Agency additional powers to regulate the use of hazardous chemicals and even to ban them.

PCB's — polychlorinated biphenyls—were singled out for special legislative attention because of widespread reports, ranging from the Hudson River to Japan, of the harm that they can cause to humans and animals.

"We have identified a mad dog in PCB and it's time to get rid of it," said Representative Gilbert Gude, the Maryland Republican who cosponsored the amendment that would impose the ban.

The amendment itself passed by a voice vote with only token resistance. Opponents contended that the Environmental Protection Agency already had the power to ban the chemical.

The bill itself passed by a vote of 319 to 45. A similar measure has passed the Senate, but without the PCB prohibi-

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tion. The difference will have to be resolved in a Senate-House conference.

With er without the PCB ban, the bill faces the possibility of a veto by President Ford. The White House has taken the position that its broad provisions would impose testing requirements on the chemical industry that would be almost impossible to meet.

But some House members said during today's debate that they felt that banning PCB's was "a moral responsibility to the people," as it was phrased by Representative Ronald U. Dellums, Democrat of California.

Representative John M. Murphy, the Democrat from Staten Island who was the floor manager of the bill, estimated that the cost of cleaning PCB's out of the Hudson River would be "over 20 million to New York State alone."

Earlier in the year the Hudson River was closed to commercial fishing because of the contamination of the food chain, particularly striped bass, by PCB's.

Representative John D. Dingell, the Michigan Democrat who was the other sponsor of the PCB amendment, said that PCB contamination had led Federal agencies to advise the public "not to eat the fish from the Hudson River, Lake Ontario, Lake Michigan, Pensacola Sound and the Milwaukee and Ohio Rivers.

Speaking for the amendment, Representative Robert L. Leggett, Democrat of California, said that PCB's were not biogradable and that "even if the ban were on today it would be 100 to 200 years before PCBs could be cleared out of the environment."

PCB's were recently discovered in the human milk of more than 30 women living in Michigan. The single most dramatic case of PCB contamination occurred in Yusho, Japan, in 1968 when more than 1,000 persons became ill from PCB's that had leaked into rice oil used for cooking.

PCB's, which have been used by the thousands of tons as insulation in electrical equipment, have been linked to cancer of the liver, the malfunction of children born to women who had been exposed to the chemical, and a variety of skin disorders.

With the case of PCB's in mind, supporters of the toxic substances bill said that only a few thousand of the 30,000 chemicals on the market have been tested to see if they are harmful.

Also, they argued, about 1,000 new chemicals come into use annually with no requirement that they be tested.

The main elements of the bill provide that:

¶The head of E.P.A. requires chemical makers to test their products for safety.

¶Manufacturers give the agency 90 days' notice before beginning commercial production of a new chemical.

¶The agency may impose restrictions on the uses of chemicals it deems hazardous.

¶The public may sue to force compliance with the bill's provisions.

¶Small chemical makers may be exempted from the bill's provisions under certain circumstances.

Similar legislation was passed by the Senate and the House in both the 92d and 93d Congresses. But conference committees failed to resolve the differences.

The chemical industry had lobbied strenuously against the legislation, contending that the provisions were unnecessary and would be too expensive.

The PCB amendment would ban, by Oct. 1, 1978, the manufacture of the chemical for nonenclosed uses, that is for almost any use other than in closed electrical equipment, and by Oct. 1, 1979, its manufacture for closed systems as well. The Environmental Protection Agency would be allowed to grant exemptions from these two provisions if the agency determined that no unreasonable risk was involved.

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