NOT TO BE RELEASED UNTIL A. M., May 14 May 12, 1972

PCB Report Released

A Federal Government task force on the chemicals known as PCBs - polychlorinated biphenyls - today issued a report recommending that all current uses of the chemicals, except use in electrical capacitors and transformers, be discontinued. The task force study concludes that current environmental levels do not constitute an imminent hazard to health, but that the effects of long-term exposure to PCBs are largely unknown.

In conjunction with the issuance of the report, the government announced several actions to deal with the PCB problem:

-- The Environmental Protection Agency will restrict the discharge of all industrial effluents of PCBs from PCB users into water so that levels of PCBs in rivers or lakes do not exceed 0.01 parts per billion.

-- The Food and Drug Administration proposed on March 18 new regulations which include new and more stringent action levels for PCBs in food, steps to prevent PCBs in food packaging, and measures to prevent contamination of food from accidents in food plants.

The task force report, entitled "PCBs and the Environment," is the result of a six-month review by eight Federal agencies. It

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includes detailed information on the production, use, and distribution of PCBs, the benefits of the chemicals, the effects of PCBs on man and wildlife, and a variety of other data related to the problem.

Despite finding "much data that it regards as inadequate and many questions that remain unanswered," the task force concluded, from all of the available scientific information on the PCB problem, that:

-- All uses of PCBs that are not essential should be discontinued, and to the extent that they must be used great care should be taken to prevent release of the substances to the environment.

-- The chemicals can have serious adverse effects on human health, but, so far as is now known, these adverse effects will not occur as a result of the levels of PCBs currently in the environment.

-- PCBs are highly persistent and can be found in almost all parts of the environment.

-- High levels of PCBs have occurred in food as a result of accidental release of the substance. Steps taken by the Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Agriculture will minimize the occurrence of such accidents in the future and avoid the food and economic losses that have accompanied the accidents.

-- The use of PCBs should not be banned entirely. If currently available substitutes were used in transformers and capacitors there

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would be a greatly increased likelihood of fire and explosion, resulting in deaths, injury, and damage to property. Furthermore, such use can be controlled so that it does not significantly contribute to environmental contamination.

-- The major gap in the regulatory system to deal with PCBs is the absence of any broad Federal authority to restrict use or distribution, to control imports, and to collect information. The task force believes that such authority is needed. It would be provided by the Administration's Toxic Substances Control Act, now pending before Congress. The Monsanto Company, the sole U.S. producer of PCBs, has reported voluntarily taking a number of actions, including discontinuing sales of PCBs for use in paints, plasticizers, sealants, adhesives, and all other open-system uses.

-- PCBs are widely manufactured in Japan, Italy, France, West Germany, and Russia, and possibly in Brazil, Argentina, India, and East Germany. Many electrical products imported from those or other countries into the United States may use PCBs. The task force knows of no way to monitor this supply unless the Toxic Substances Control Act or similar legislation is enacted. Until then, buyers of products which may contain PCBs are cautioned that they should question their overseas suppliers about the potential presence of PCBs and consider the substitution of suitable alternatives.

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As an additional measure, the United States has asked the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) through its Environment Committee to make a special review of member states' national policies concerning PCBs and also to identify products moving in international trade which contain PCBs. OECD, whose membership includes all major Western industrialized states plus Japan and Australia, has been giving priority attention to the problem of PCBs over the past year.

Represented on the interdepartmental task force are the following: Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce (Assistant Secretary for Science and Technology and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Food and Drug Administration and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences), Department of the Interior, Office of Science and Technology, and the Council on Environmental Quality.

The 192-page report "PCBs and the Environment" is available at $6.00 from the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, Virginia 22151.

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