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REVIEW OF EXPOSURE STUDIES SHOWS NO LINK BETWEEN PCB AND HUMAN CANCER

An extensive scientific review of more than two dozen health studies dealing with human exposures to PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) fails to show a link between the chemical and human cancer.

The findings were presented in August at the national meeting of the American Chemical Society by Dr. William R. Gaffey, manager of epidemiology at Monsanto Company. Dr. Gaffey, who conducted the review of the independent epidemiologic studies, said that while they have shown that exposure to PCBs can cause temporary skin problems, there are no clinically observable long-term health effects including the occurrence of cancer.

"The one fact on which all occupational studies of health effects agree is that there has been no clinical illness associated with PCB exposure other than dermatitis (skin disorder)," Dr. Gaffey said. "Studies of nonoccupationally exposed populations have found neither dermatitis nor other clinical evidence of exposure-related effects."

Dr. Gaffey told his audience that people exposed to PCBs through their work could have higher levels of the chemical in their blood than others. Consequently, occupational exposure to PCBs at high levels is associated with the occurrence of the skin disorder chloracne. "However, the relationship is not straightforward and suggests that the actual risk of chloracne is also a function of individual susceptibility and personal work habits," Dr. Gaffey said.

The conclusions are based on an extensive review of published and unpublished epidemiologic studies which have been performed by a number of scientists in the United States and abroad, including those from federal and state governmental agencies, universities and medical schools.

"The PCB studies were broken

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down into three categories," Dr. Gaffey said. "Accidental, heavy exposures with short- and long-term health effects, the relationship between exposure and the accumulation of the substance in the body, and the studies of populations that were known or suspected of being exposed to the chemical."