STATEMENT TO RESPOND TO PRESS OR OTHER EXTERNAL INQUIRIES CONCERNING PCB SPILLAGE INTO A CANAL ENTERING THE RIVER SAMBRE

We were informed by one of our customers, Ateliers de Constructions Electriques de Charleroi S.A. (ACEC), on Wednesday afternoon (May 18) that there had been a spillage of Pyroclor polychlorinated biphenyl transformer fluid (PCB) in the Charleroi area.

We understand the fluid leaked into a canal after the rupture of an electrical transformer supplied by ACEC, which was operating in a steel rolling mill at the premises of the Hainaut Sambre Company at Couillet near Charleroi. The transformer was situated alongside a short stretch of a cul de sac canal nearly 1,000 metres from the entrance to the Sambre.

Two Monsanto representatives went to the site to assist ACEC personnel in dealing with the incident.

ACEC was advised to inform the local health and water authorities that there had been a spillage.

20/5/77
Draft III
Peter W. Whippy

DSW 266675

ANSWERS TO ASSIST IN RESPONDING TO FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS ON PCB SPILLAGE IN BELGIUM

Q. How toxic are PCBs ?

A. PCBs are not very toxic to humans, but are harmful by ingestion, inhalation or skin contact and will cause irritation of skin and eyes.
Unfortunately, PCBs are a cumulative pollutant, especially to marine environment. They are not readily biodegradable and studies have shown that PCBs are injurious to certain forms of bird, aquatic and animal life.

Q. What is the effect on humans who drink water contaminated with PCBs ?

A. PCBs are very slightly soluble in water. The immediate effect on humans would be minimal - even at high concentrations. The same comment applies to animals or birds drinking contaminated water. The principal problem is that PCBs accumulate in the eco-cycle and can enter the food chain.

Q. What is the effect on humans who eat fish or meat containing PCBs ?

A. There would be no immediate effect. We would emphasis that PCBs are not very toxic to humans, but obviously it would be inadvisable to eat any fish suspected of PCB contamination. Please bear in mind that this spill occured at the dead end of a stretch of industrial canal water unlikely to contain edible fish.

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Q. How much went into the canal ?

A. We understand the spillage is about 2,000 liters and that it happened April 22.

Q. Does this mean that PCBs can get into local drinking water supplies ?

A. We don't know at this stage since we have no detailed information on the spillage. Suggest you contact ACEC for the latest information.

Q. Is this spillage dangerous to health ?

A. We repeat, PCBs are not very toxic to humans, but ingestion, inhalation or skin contact should be avoided since it causes irritation of skin and eyes.

Q. Do you manufacture PCBs in Belgium ?

A. No. PCBs are manufactured by Monsanto in the United Kingdom and USA, but the company is withdrawing from the market and shutting down its production. This was announced by the company last year and we will not make or market PCBs after October 31 (1977). Monsanto's withdrawal from the PCBs market was decided upon voluntarily by the company after research indicated that the chemical was finding its way into the environment and persisting.

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Q. Are your customers given information about the toxic nature of this product and action to be taken in the event of an accident or spillage ?

A. Yes. Multi-lingual warning labels are affixed to containers which are special reinforced drums. These labels give a brief description of the nature of the material and appropriate action to be taken in the event of a spill or leak. Technical documentation and advice is also given to PCB customers.

Q. Have the Belgian Health and Water Authorities been notified of the spillage ?

A. The customer ACEC has been advised to do so and report actions taken by them to contain the spill. Monsanto will provide any technical advice requested.

ends

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