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Monsanto drops PCB production

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co. will halt production of PCB insulating fluids next year because of the public's fear of adverse effects from the chemical.

Monsanto will withdraw completely from the market no later than Oct. 31, 1977, said Earle H. Harbison Jr., general manager of the firm's specialty chemicals division.

Harbison said Tuesday the target date would have been sooner, but electrical transformer and capacitor manufacturers hav said they would be unable to convert to other materials any earlier.

Monsanto is the only manufacturer of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl), a stable, fire-resistant chemical.

The Environmental Protection Agency has found that PCBs build up in the environment and are thought to cause reproductive failures, gastric disorders and skin lesions in mammals.

About 300 million pounds of the virtually indestructible chemical have been dumped into landfills, leaked into water supplies and allowed to sift into production sites, the EPA contends.

EPA Administrator Russell E. Train praised Monsanto's decision, terming it "a significant step in dealing with the total problem of PCB contamination."

But he noted that PCBs already in the environment "will be there for years, moving into life systems, including humans. The problems still need to be addressed vigorously by government and industry."

PCB has been blamed as a major source of pollution in New York's Hudson River.

New York State officials and the General Electric Co. recently reached agreement for GE to contribute $3 million toward the cost of cleaning PCBs from the Hudson.

The accumulation of PCBs in waterways, Harbison said, triggered the firm's decision to cease production as soon as the electrical industry could find alternate fluids and convert its equipment and components to their use.

Monsanto had earlier quit making PCBs for use in carbonless copy paper, fire resistant hydraulic fluids, heat transfer fluid and plasticizers.

The chemical is manufactured at a Monsanto plant in Sauget, Ill. Twenty jobs will be eliminated by the decision to withdraw from the PCB market, but a company spokesman said employes working in those positions would be shifted to other work at the plant.