

Monsanto

file PCBs

PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

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November 19, 1982

Mr. D. L. K. Bowers
R.F. Winder Ltd.
Belgrave Electrical Works
P.O. Box 13, Stanningley
Pudsey, West Yorkshire, LS28 6HB
England

Dear Mr. Bowers:

Mr. John Moss, News Editor of Electrical Review has shared your recent letter with me and invited me to comment -- which I'm most happy to do.

I've enclosed a copy of my September 15 correspondence to Electrical Review which formed the basis for their follow-up article. Please compare the two -- my correspondence and the ensuing article -- and I think you'll find the answers to most of your questions and concerns.

As I have stated in the attached letter, Monsanto is not trying to "give it (PCBs) a clean bill of health," but rather -- we are striving to put their risk to man in proper perspective. I think the Electrical Review headline, "P.C.B.s -- as Safe as Salt?" illustrates just how difficult that is to achieve. We, too, found this headline to be dangerously misleading, and we would add, "irresponsible and totally unprofessional."

There are many seemingly subtle but in reality major scientific differences in what I actually said and the way it ended up in print. A case in point is the matter of toxicity which I discussed only because in the earlier article in Electrical Review, PCBs were characterized as "highly toxic."

What I said is (see paragraph two of the enclosed letter): "PCBs on an acute basis are about as toxic to humans as common table salt and are thus classified as only mildly toxic." This is absolutely true, scientific, unarguable fact.

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Electrical Review quoted the company (me) as saying "Standard toxicity texts demonstrate that P.C.B.s are less harmful than table salt," and then elected to go with their cute little headline. Electrical Review also credited Monsanto with terming PCBs "a relatively innocuous chemical." I submit that this is a gross distortion. See paragraph four of my September 15 letter: "they are not innocuous (emphasis added), i.e., like most chemicals, PCBs can produce harmful effects at very high doses."

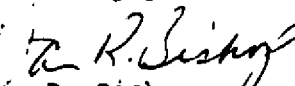
Your only major comments not addressed in my original letter concerns fire situations and the Binghamton, New York incident.

As a "world's leader in the field of dealing with all problems related to Askarels/PCBs" (your words), I'm surprised you're not aware of the recent combustion studies sponsored by the U.S. EPA which concluded that dioxins (presumably the "harmful vapors to which you refer) are not a decomposition product of PCB combustion. (Ref: High-Temperature Degradation Characteristics of Hazardous Organic Wastes -- a Laboratory Approach. D.S. Duval, et al, University of Dayton Research Institute, Dayton, Ohio, draft report June, 1981).

This notwithstanding, you must know that in electrical fires, harmful vapors are commonly produced from burning electrical insulation, wiring, plastic potting compounds, paints and especially other oil and chlorinated hydrocarbon chemical components of the electrical fluid. For example, the other major ingredient in PCB-askarel transformers is trichlorobenzene which is added by the transformer manufacturer. It is well known that dioxins can be formed during the combustion of trichlorobenzene.

In summary, the reasons behind our effort to set the record straight on this subject are clearly stated in the attached letter and the need to do this is once again demonstrated by the confusion and misinformation demonstrated in your otherwise well intended criticism.

Sincerely yours,


Dan R. Bishop
Director, Environmental Communications

DRB:ec

Enclosures

CC: Mr. John Moss
Electrical Review

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Distribution of D.L.K. Bowers letter (attached):

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