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PCB substitute will serve only 15% of market

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A Greenwood-based division of a leading producer of high-voltage electrical capacitors announced yesterday it had developed a substitute for polychelrinated biphenyls (PCBs) in electrical insulating fluid, but a spokesman of the Monsanto Co., the only U.S. PCB manufacturer, said that the new compound will serve "only 15 per cent" of the PCB market.

Dan Bishop, Monsanto public relations representative, said yesterday the PCB replacement developed jointly by McGraw-Edison and Dow Chemical — to be marketed as "Edisol" — "is only a replacement for 15 per cent of the market. It's used only in high-voltage capacitors, which is a small portion," of the industrial uses for the toxic chemical.

H. R. Keith, general manager of the McGraw-Edison Co. power systems division plant in Greenwood, told a press conference held in Columbia yesterday that Edisol is a safer, more biodegradable substitute for the environmentally hazardous PCBs.

The PCB compound, used as an insulating fluid in electrical equipment, causes ill effects in humans including cancer, skin irritation, and damage to the nervous and reproductive systems. They are not biodegradable, and are thus persistent in the environment.

Keith said McGraw-Edison's Greenwood plant will eliminate its own use of PCBs and substitute Edisol in its manufacturing process, and will also make the PCB substitute available to other manufacturers of power systems.

Edisol is expected to cost about 25 per cent more than PCBs.

Keith said yesterday company researchers began searching for a safe alternative to PCBs in 1971, when evidence on the dangers of the compound first came to light.

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