PCB - Articles

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Bayer ending highly chlorinated PCB chemical sales

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FOLLOWING PRESSURE from the West German Ministry of Health, Bayer has decided to stop marketing highly chlorinated PCBs, chemicals widely used as plasticisers in plastic films and paints, by the end of the year anywhere in the world.

Monsanto, the only producer in the U.K. and the U.S., stopped selling the products in both countries recently because of the possibility that the chemicals might be poisonous. The company imposed a voluntary oan in the U.K. last March and ended production at its plant at Newport, Monmouthshire.

Sales of the less highly chlorinated PCBs, used as transformer and hydraulic system fluids, is continuing in the U.K. and elsewhere, since these applications are controllable and there is little danger that the chemicals will escape into the outside environment.

As soon as Bayer stops sales of the highly chlorinated products in Germany, Monsanto is expected to follow suit.

The German Health Ministry's investigations have shown that what in many cases was first thought to be DDT was in fact PCBs. In Germany DDT is banned—although its use is allowed for a few purposes—and the EEC Commission is understood to be about to ask other member-States to do likewise.

No scientific information is available to prove the extent of the toxicity of PCBs, known chemically as polychlorinated biphenyls, but it is generally accepted that they are present in living organisms and that they accumulate in the fatty cells. The trouble in the U.K. started in December, 1969, when the issues of a number of birds found dead in the Irish Sea were shown to contain accumulations of PCBs.

Bayer is trying to find a substitute for the lower chlorinated PCBs used in closed systems, and the West German Health Ministry is pressing for rapid results.

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