Monsanto Targets Pollution

$20 Million Effort To Clean Effluent

By Christine Bertelson
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Monsanto Co. announced Tuesday a $20 million effort to improve water quality in the Mississippi River by eliminating or recycling many of the toxic chemicals it discharges from its W.G. Krummrich plant in Sauget.

Monsanto's waste water is handled by the American Bottoms sewer plant in Sauget, which then discharges its effluent into the Mississippi. Those discharges are laden with organic pollutants and heavy metals — discharges that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has called the most toxic to aquatic life in a six-state area.

A company official estimated that Monsanto's pollution control steps would reduce by one third the amount of waste materials that the American Bottoms plant releases into the Mississippi.

Monsanto is taking the actions to meet tough new federal and local water pollution standards that will be effective within the next two years, said William J. Boyle Jr., manager of the Krummrich plant.

Boyle outlined Monsanto's effort at a news conference Tuesday afternoon at the plant.

"The program will help position the plant for the future and is in keeping with the company's commitment to continuously improve its environmental performance," Boyle said.

Once new equipment is in place to treat the waste water, the Krummrich plant's effluent will be cleaner than federal and local standards will require, he said. Monsanto meets current federal and local waste water standards, Boyle noted.

The pollution control measures also should ease legal problems faced by the village of Sauget.

The EPA is in the process of settling a suit brought in 1987 against Sauget for violating clean water standards. The plant has been operating under an interim consent decree, and appears to be complying with the clean water regulations, said Anne Weinert, an environmental engineer for the EPA's office in Chicago.

"I would hope this does clear up quite a lot of the problems at American Bottoms," Weinert said. "It will certainly reduce the organic flow into the plant," and subsequently into the Mississippi River.

Monsanto's waste water is regulated by the EPA under the Clean Water Act. New regulations effective Nov. 5, 1990, will require the organic chemical industry to clean up its waste water before it is sent to municipal sewer plants.

Within the next two years, Monsanto will install equipment to:

- Reduce the amount of waste products generated during the manufacture of paradichlorobenzene, PDCB. Monsanto is a major world producer of PDCB, the active ingredient in mothballs and bathroom deodorants. Monsanto plans to increase its production of PDCB to 35 million pounds a year from 24 million pounds, Boyle said.
- Install or improve scrubbers in smokestacks to trap and recycle airborne volatile organic chemicals. Volatile organic chemicals trapped by scrubbers have in the past been washed into the sewer system.
- Recover 91 percent of the ammonia it uses in the manufacture of other chemicals. Monsanto has been able to recycle only 40 percent of the ammonia it uses.

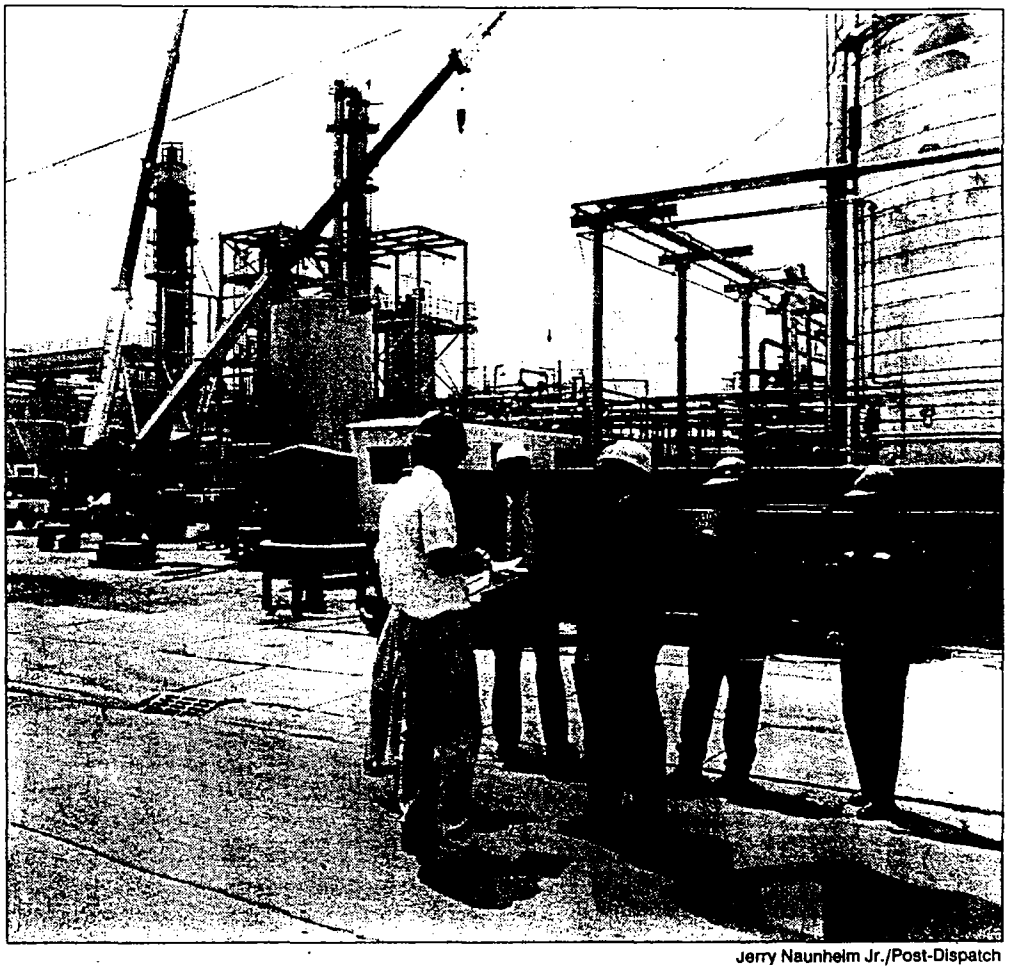
Monsanto will be unable to recover all the costs of installing the pollution controls, said Max McCombs, Monsanto's chief of environmental and governmental affairs. On the contrary, the equipment will add $4.5 million to the company's $250 million annual operating budget, McCombs said. Monsanto spends about $12 million a year on environmental controls at the Krummrich plant, he said.

The recycling equipment also will reduce the amount of chemical wastes Monsanto sends out of state for incineration, McCombs said.

The equipment will eliminate 11 organic chemicals regulated by the EPA and sharply reduce levels of several others that will be subject to future regulations by Sauget.

The 11 regulated chemicals include benzene, several benzene compounds, phenols and toluene. Benzene is a carcinogen. The other chemicals have varying levels of toxicity. They are all common industrial chemicals used in large quantities. They require special precautions in handling and disposal.

McCombs said the program will affect 60 to 70 percent of the production of chemicals in nine of the company's 12 departments.



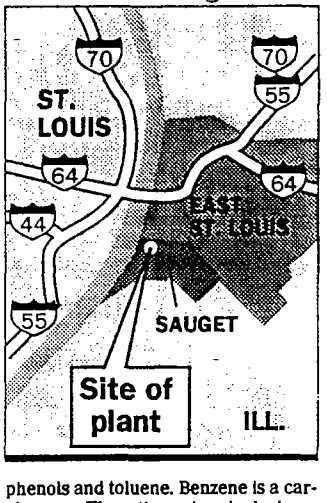
Jerry Naunheim Jr./Post-Dispatch

Monsanto Co. officials conferring near some of the company's equipment designed to remove toxic chemicals from wastewater discharged from the W.G. Krummrich plant in Sauget.

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WILLIAM J. BOYLE Jr., plant manager.

Monsanto's Sauget Plant



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