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Facts on pollution said to be withheld

From Peter Nichols
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The eve of an international conference on pollution of the oceans brought an allegation today that Monsanto, one of the world's leading producers of synthetic chemicals, were withholding information about their output of substances causing pollution.

The complaint was made by Professor Edward Goldberg, professor of chemistry at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at La Jolla in California. He was introducing a conference to be held under the auspices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (F.A.O.).

British, French and American scientists, he said, had sought information from Monsanto in order to know how chemicals dangerous to man were finding their way into the marine environment. But Monsanto took the view that there was "possibly no problem" and refused to provide information, the professor said.

The international conference which will bring together some 300 environmentalists is expected to recommend, Professor Goldberg added, the formation of an international body responsible for monitoring pollution throughout the world. Countries would be asked to send in reports on the production and usage of noxious products.

Professor Goldberg said that one of the problems of increasing pollution was that birds and fish were found dead with a variety of noxious substances in their systems. It was not clear which had actually killed cock robin. The conference could be expected to call for more research into the natural processes of the oceans and the impact of man's waste.

Professor Mario Ruivo, secretary of the conference, gave another example of the need for specialized training. He said that large tankers were now sailing round Africa, yet there was not one centre in the whole of that continent and very few technicians capable of dealing with an accident which might happen to a tanker. The conference could be expected to issue a call for specialized training in dealing with pollution.

The meeting which opens here tomorrow is called the Technical Conference on Marine Pollution and its Effects on living Resources and Fishing. It will last 10 days.

The Baltic is already being likened to poisoned Lake Eyrie, while the Mediterranean is described as rapidly heading in certain parts towards a hazardous level of pollution. The North Sea fisheries are also affected, while oil spillages are even threatening bottom organisms such as the coral reefs of eastern Australia now menaced by parasite starfish.

A prospectus prepared for the conference contains the warning that pollution in general continues to grow at an alarming rate as human populations multiply and industrialization increases. The threat to the marine environment is especially serious since the seas and oceans, comprising 70 per cent of the earth's surface "offer one of man's greatest hopes" for feeding himself now and in the future.

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