Monsanto says it finds no cancer-PCB link

Monsanto Co. has found no cases of either malignant melanoma or cancer of the pancreas among current or former employes who work with PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), the company announced Thursday.

A malignant melanoma is a cancerous tumor.

The information comes from an ongoing study at the company's Sauget, Ill., manufacturing plant. The health records of more than 200 current and former employes have been reviewed thus far, and the study is expected to continue for 12 to 18 months.

MONSANTO'S REVIEW was prompted by a recent Mobil Oil Corp. study that reported three cases of malignant melanoma and two cases of pancreatic cancer among 72 employes at a Mobil plant in New Jersey who handle electrical insulating fluid containing PCBs.

"In my opinion, the fact that we have found no cases of either of these cancers casts strong doubt that the findings of the Mobil study were in fact related to PCB," said Dr. George Roush, director of Monsanto's medical and environmental health department.

Emphasizing that the study was incomplete and all findings are tentative, Roush also said the review discovered a higher incidence of lung cancer among employes in the PCB unit than would have been expected on the basis of National Cancer Institute statistics.

HOWEVER, "to date, the evidence developed from this preliminary study would suggest that the cases of lung cancer are not PCB dose-response related," Roush said.

Another tentative finding during the study was that PCB workers lived longer than the national average, he said.

Monsanto is the only U.S. manufacturer of PCBs. In January, the company announced it would phase out production of the chemical, which is also used as a flame retardant. About 10 days ago, the House of Representatives voted to ban production of PCBs within two years.

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