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Firm To Stop Production Of Polluting PCB

ST. LOUIS (AP) — The Monsanto Co. says it plans to phase out production of the polluting chemical PCB within three years.

The company's Sauget, Ill., plant near here is the only domestic manufacturer of the chemical (polychlorinated biphenyls), which has been termed a significant health hazard by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Asked to comment on the decision, a federal agency spokesman said, "We love it."

Monsanto cut off sales of the chemical in 1971, except to the electrical industry. The substance is a chemically stable fluid used as an insulator in certain electrical equipment, but before then had been used in other products, including paints and adhesives.

The EPA has estimated that 700 million pounds of the virtually indestructible PCB has been produced in the United States since 1929. It said last month that about 300 million pounds were in use, with most of the remainder dumped into landfills, leached into water or allowed to sift into production sites or in lake and river bottoms.

Some fish from Lake Michigan and the Hudson River are reportedly so contaminated by the substance that they are unfit to eat. The Food and Drug Administration has found other unacceptable PCB levels in the upper Mississippi and off the Southern California coast.

PCB has been shown to cause reproductive failures, gastric disorders and skin lesions in mammals.

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