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Monsanto Would Ban DDT-Type Product

Monsanto Co. has requested a federal ban on insecticides containing one of its own products, a company spokesman told the Post-Dispatch yesterday.

The product is polychlorinated biphenyl, or PCB for short. It is chemically similar to DDT and is alleged to be threatening a "major ecological disaster."

The allegation was made Friday by Representative William F. Ryan (Dem.), New York. He called upon the Nixon Administration "to mobilize all available resources to detail the extent of the threat and steps that can be taken to eliminate it."

PCB, actually a generic term covering several closely related chemical compounds, has been manufactured for more than 40 years. It is a constituent in plastics, flame retardants, insulating fluids, synthetic rubber, electrical products, floor tile, printer's ink, coating for paper and fabric, brake linings, automobile body sealants, paints, asphalt and adhesives.

PCB is manufactured in Europe and Japan, as well as at Monsanto plants in Anniston, Ala., and in Sauget, Ill., on the East Side, a short distance from downtown St. Louis.

It has been used also in insecticides, not as a poison, but to make them last longer after they have been sprayed.

Skin Irritation

Ryan said the chemical could cause serious skin irritation, and if taken internally (by breathing or ingestion), "the result is even more dramatic and frightening.

"Among symptoms are nausea, rapid breathing, loss of weight and lowered red blood cell count. More serious results are the deterioration of the kidneys, jaundice and atrophy of the liver," he said.

"In sufficient quantities PCB can cause death."

Ryan accused the United States Department of Agriculture of "bureaucratic fumbling" in failing to regulate the chemical.

He credited the Committee for Environmental Information in St. Louis with bringing PCB to his attention.

Extremely Persistent

Writing in the January-February issue of CEI's periodical, Environment, Robert Risebrough, a marine biologist at the University of California, reported that heavy concentrations of the chemical had been found in the body tissues of birds of prey in Sweden and North America. It has also been found in fish, sea birds, human fat and human milk. Like its chemical cousin, DDT, it is extremely persistent and in some respects more potent.

Like DDT, PCB affects the hormonal balance of birds with the result that they may lay thin-shelled, fragile eggs, or eggs with dead embryos.

PCB may enter the environment, Risebrough wrote, from the stacks of manufacturing plants, from leaky hydraulic and cooling systems, from paints and other coatings, and from incinerators where items containing the substance are being disposed of.

"The possible PCB hazard, like so many environmental hazards, is one of long-term, low-level exposure and perhaps of effects from its combination with other poisons," Risebrough said. "Effects on people might not show up for many years."

Used As Insulation

A Monsanto spokesman told the Post-Dispatch that most of the company's production of PCB was used as a fluid electrical insulation in sealed industrial electrical equipment.

Other uses include closed air conditioning systems and certain kinds of specialty adhesives and caulking compounds "where it is tightly contained with another substance and would have very little chance of getting into the air."

Monsanto has not sold its PCB in insecticides for 10 years, he said. He added that the company was unaware that any of its customers used the chemical for anything that was sprayed or widely broadcast in the environment.

"We have recently got in touch with everyone of our customers and informed them of this environmental hazard and asked them not to use PCB in any system where it could get into the atmosphere," the company spokesman said. The warning was issued after the company was questioned about PCB by the Environment editorial staff.

The spokesman said Monsanto carefully monitored both airborne and liquid waste discharges from its PCB manufacturing facilities, including the Krummrich plant in Sauget, but he could not specify how much PCB escaped.

Monsanto will begin marketing substitutes for slow-degrading PCB later this year. They will be either non-degrading forms of the substance, or different chemical compounds with similar properties, the spokesman said.

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