NIOSH inspection June 1 at Westinghouse plant

By DON JORDAN
H-T Environmental Writer

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has scheduled an inspection tour of the Bloomington Westinghouse plant for June 1, according to agency officials in Cincinnati.

"We know nothing about what's in there," said Dr. Robert Ligo of the NIOSH medical section.

He added that NIOSH had been asked by Westinghouse laboratory workers to test air levels in the plant and to determine if those workers have been exposed to "significant amounts" of airborne contaminants associated with Monsanto PCB fluids called Aroclors, used by the local Westinghouse plant.

The June 1 date was set after Westinghouse denied entry to NIOSH inspectors April 26. Westinghouse asked for the new date, saying it wanted to have a joint inspection by NIOSH and the company's own industrial hygienists.

Although Westinghouse Electric Corporation has maintained that the only PCB fluid used at the local capacitor manufacturing plant is Monsanto's Aroclor 1016, two other PCB fluids have also been used at the plant — with one of those being used in current production.

Robert Anderson, environmental communications manager for the local plant told area residents at a League of Women Voters PCB Forum earlier this week that another fluid from Monsanto, Aroclor 1221 is also in use at the plant.

The Indiana State Board of Health discovered yet another fluid, Aroclor 1232 in the plant during a visit on Dec. 15. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found the 1232 and the 1221 fluids in stock during a January visit.

Anderson said that Aroclor 1221, a PCB fluid containing 11 per cent Biphenyl, is being used at the plant at this time in a "special application."

Biphenyl, a building block for PCBs, is present in all the Aroclor fluids made by Monsanto and used by Westinghouse, according to information provided by Monsanto.

Federal air standards for Biphenyl have been set at 0.2 parts per million. Biphenyl has the ability to vaporize at even room temperature with quantities in the vapor increasing as temperatures increase. The The chemical which can cause severe injury and death when breathed or ingested in small quantities.

Anderson said that Monsanto had "withdrawn" Aroclor 1221 from the market for "safety reasons." However, he later qualified that statement, saying

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that Monsanto has merely refused to sell the 1221 fluid except in railroad tank car quantities, thereby eliminating most sales since only small quantities are used by industry.

Anderson said prior to the League of Women Voters PCB Forum, that the company was taking adequate safety measures to guard workers while working with the 1221 fluid.

"We've tested (the air) and we're well within the allowable limits," said Anderson.

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