NEWS

Monsanto

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NO LINK WITH HUMAN CANCER
ACCORDING TO PCB REVIEW

BETHESDA,MD, May 12 -- Exposure to polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs, is not related to human cancer, according to an extensive review of several recent international health studies on the chemical.

Dr. William R. Gaffey of Monsanto Company, who conducted the scientific review, presented his findings today at an EPA-sponsored symposium on the health effects of PCBs in Bethesda, Maryland. Participants in the symposium are reviewing data published about the chemical over the past five years.

"The data available at the present time do not provide the consistent, exposure-related results that would justify concluding that PCBs are carcinogenic in human beings," Dr. Gaffey reported. Dr. Gaffey is manager of epidemiology at Monsanto.

Since 1978, there have been ten epidemiologic studies of the human health effects of PCBs performed by a number of scientists in the United States and abroad, including those from federal and state governmental agencies, universities and medical schools.

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Dr. Gaffey said that, although the studies have shown that occupational exposure to PCBs can cause a temporary skin disorder, dermatitis, the relationship is not straightforward given individual susceptibility and personal work habits.

Additionally, the studies failed to find a link between disease and populations which are non-occupationally exposed to PCBs, Dr. Gaffey said.

PCBs, formerly manufactured by Monsanto in the United States, were used primarily as fire-resistant insulating fluids in electrical transformers and capacitors. For more than 40 years, their use was required in most high-rise buildings, schools and hospitals where the risks of fire or explosion were major concerns. Monsanto voluntarily discontinued production in 1977 after it was confirmed that PCBs accumulate in the environment and alternative products were developed. Production of PCBs was banned by the EPA in 1979, though the compounds are still manufactured in several countries around the world.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. William R. Gaffey holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in mathematical statistics. Prior to joining Monsanto, he was a Senior Epidemiologist at the Stanford Research Institute, Palo Alto, Calif. and a Lecturer in Epidemiology and International Health at the University of California Medical School, San Francisco, Calif. He is the author of more than 20 scientific papers and epidemiology studies.

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