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Monsanto Seeks EPA Study

Company Claims 'False Controversy' Over Tests

By Robert J. Meyer

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Monsanto Co. has asked the federal government to make an "impartial review" of two tests of workers exposed to dioxin to settle what Monsanto says is a "false controversy" surrounding the studies' accuracy.

Dioxin is a toxic byproduct of some chemical processes. Monsanto wants the studies, which were conducted by the company, to be examined by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

Critics contend that Monsanto's research was flawed.

The studies, published in scientific journals in 1980 and 1982, failed to find any chronic health effects of dioxin exposure other than chloracne, a serious form of acne.

Monsanto's research involves workers at Monsanto's Nitro, W. Va., plant who were exposed to dioxin. The company analyzed cancer-related deaths of employees who manufactured 2,4,5-T, a herbicide that also was an ingredient in the defoliant Agent Orange used in the Vietnam War.

Monsanto cited the studies in defending a suit brought by residents of Sturgeon, Mo. in 1979. They claimed that their health had been impaired after a railroad accident that caused a spill of 19,000 gallons of wood preservative and a tiny amount — estimated at a teaspoon — of dioxin.

In 1987, an Illinois circuit court jury in Belleville, awarded \$29,000 to a family whose farm was near the accident site and \$1 each to 43 other plaintiffs. But the jury also awarded \$16.25 million in punitive damages.

Monsanto appealed the punitive damages verdict to the Illinois Fifth District Appellate Court in Mount Vernon, Ill. Monsanto said its Nitro workers' dioxin studies are ac-

curate, adding that they have been unfairly assailed by environmental groups — such as Greenpeace — and an EPA chemist, Cato Jenkins, whose comments do not reflect EPA policy.

"The impartial action [by the federal government] would serve to put an end to this false controversy," Monsanto said in an Oct. 1 letter to EPA. "Absent such government action, Monsanto will continue to suffer damage to its reputation."

Monsanto sent a copy of the letter to the Post-Dispatch.

The letter said that a memorandum written earlier this year by Jenkins contained "untrue allegations" that the company had deliberately under-reported rates of cancer of the Nitro workers.

"Notwithstanding our efforts to correct the record, these baseless charges have been repeated in newspaper accounts and even before a congressional subcommittee," the letter said.

Jenkins didn't return phone calls. In previous interviews, she has said that some of her arguments were taken from plaintiffs' charges in the Sturgeon case.

Dan Bishop, a Monsanto spokesman, said EPA has not responded to the company's letter.

"These allegations have been around for a while," said William H. Farland, an EPA official, in a telephone interview. He runs EPA's office of health and environmental assessment.

Farland added that a NIOSH scientist, Marilyn Fingerhut, is conducting a national study of workers exposed to dioxin. "Her analysis includes the workers at Nitro," Farland said. "Her study will re-examine this. The study is under review [by agency scientists]." Fingerhut didn't return phone calls.

Critics contend that Monsanto's research was flawed.

Oil Prices Hike Steam Heat Rates

By Mark Schlinkmann

Regional Political Correspondent

A steep boost in fuel oil prices due to the Persian Gulf crisis has prompted at least an 18 percent increase in steam heat rates for many downtown commercial and residential buildings.

A temporary six-month rate boost was approved Friday by the Ill.-State Development Agency's board for more than three-fourths of Ill.-State's 300 steam heat customers. The rate boost will be retroactive to last month.

The rates could jump even higher — or could drop — during the six-month period according to fluctuations in price of fuel oil, which is burned to produce the steam.

Ill.-State contracts with St. Louis

that would be too steep.

Ill.-State "will monitor the application of these procedures for correctness on a monthly basis for the duration of the emergency," a briefing paper stated.

The board voted unanimously to approve the 18 percent plan, which was recommended by Ill.-State executive director John Leary. The board met at Ill.-State's East St. Louis garage.

Speaking against the move were representatives of Plaza Square Apartments.

Robbyn Stewart, Plaza Square manager, urged the board to limit the boost to only three months. "We don't know what's going to happen in the Middle East," she said. "There is no

ens downtown to drop steam heat and adopt alternative heating methods.

The end result, she said, would be less business and revenue for Thermal and Ill.-State.

Stewart also complained that Ill.-State was not imposing a similar rate boost on so-called interruptible customers of steam heat — which have heating systems that can choose to use either steam or natural gas in a given month depending on which is cheaper.

In response, Leary noted in an interview after the meeting that the interruptible customers' rates are determined by a formula tied to the price of natural gas so as to keep steam rates competitive.

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Greenpeace, Chemist Challenge Monsanto On Dioxin Findings

By William H. Freivogel

Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Greenpeace and a whistle-blower at the Environmental Protection Agency are accusing Monsanto Co. of fraudulently understating the health risks of dioxin.

Both the international environmental organization and the EPA chemist called upon the agency to conduct an independent evaluation of what they say are flawed Monsanto studies indicating that dioxin has little health effect on humans.

The EPA chemist, Cate Jenkins, also urged a criminal investigation of the firm, alleging evidence of dioxin's ill effects.

A Monsanto spokesman said Wednesday that there appeared to be a criminal case and so declined to comment on Jenkins' charges.

But the company said that Greenpeace's allegations were untrue and noted that Monsanto sent a letter to

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the EPA last month asking it to audit the studies to clear the air.

Jenkins, a chemist in the Regulatory Development Branch at EPA, wrote a memo Nov. 15 to the agency's Office of Criminal Investigations accusing the company of a "long pattern of fraud" concerning "dioxin contamination of a wide range of Monsanto Corp. products, as well as health studies of Monsanto's dioxin-exposed workers."

The memo indicates that Jenkins, known at the EPA as a whistle-blower, met Nov. 14 with agents of the National Enforcement Investigations Center, which conducts EPA's criminal inquiries. EPA refused to comment on whether it was conducting a criminal investigation.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace is releasing a report today that, it says, exposes "fraudulent and manipulated science" in Monsanto's studies of the effect of dioxin on workers at its plant in Norcross, Ga. An explosion at the plant in 1982 exposed workers to dioxin.

The Greenpeace report is being released in Washington and at dioxin-contaminated sites around the country, including Times Beach, Mo.

The 20-page report, written by former Shell Oil Co. chemist Pat Costner,

says that studies done for Monsanto in 1980 and 1983 made several key scientific mistakes.

In two studies, for example, some people exposed to dioxin were included in the "control" group.

Because regulators relied on the Monsanto studies as proof that dioxin is not too dangerous to humans, EPA should review all decisions based on those studies, Greenpeace said.

The group also called upon EPA to set up a national dioxin elimination program, which would phase out use of chlorine and chlorinated compounds in pesticides and would eventually ban some wood preservatives.

Dan R. Jenkins, director of corporate communications at Monsanto, said that most of the allegations by Greenpeace were not new. He said that Jenkins' memo had been based largely upon claims made in a three-year trial in Belleville, Ill., where residents sought damages for exposure to a small amount of dioxin after a train derailment in 1979.

In her memo, Jenkins wrote: "Monsanto covered up the dioxin contamination of a wide range of its products," including Aroclor 1248, the disinfectant. Members of the Canadian Parliament recently began an investigation of dioxin contamination, she wrote.

The memo also maintained that, according to Monsanto documents, samples of herbicides submitted by the company to the Department of Agriculture in the 1970s had been "doctored" and that highly contaminated samples had not been submitted. The herbicides were used in the Agent Orange defoliants during the Vietnam War.

The memo and the Greenpeace report is targeted at the 1980 and 1983 studies of Monsanto workers, which were supervised by Dr. Raymond Suskind of the Kettering Institute in Cincinnati.

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