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Monsanto will quit supplying PCBs in a year

The Monsanto Co. will withdraw as the nation's major supplier of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) by Oct. 31, 1977 in an effort to reduce the substance's impact on the environment.

Earle H. Harbison Jr., general manager of Monsanto's specialty chemicals division, said the firm would have withdrawn production of the chemical sooner had Monsanto's customers' timetables permitted.

The chemical, which is extremely fire resistant and is used as an electrical insulator in transformers and capacitators has been found by the Environmental Protection Agency to build up in the environment and is thought to cause reproductive failures, gastric disorders and skin lesions in mammals.

THE EPA estimates about 300 million pounds of the indestructible chemical have been dumped into landfills, leaked into water supplies and allowed to sift into production sites.

Harbison said the same qualities that made the chemical desirable as an electrical insulator since it was first introduced more than 40 years ago cause it to be an environmental problem.

"Because of this tendency to resist biodegradation, Monsanto announced last January its decision to voluntarily cease production as soon as the electrical industry could find viable alternate fluids and convert its equipment and components to their use," he added.

The firm manufactures the chemical at its William G. Krummrich plant in Sauget, Ill. Twenty jobs will be eliminated by the decision to withdraw from the PCB market, but a company spokesman said employes working in those positions would be shifted to other work at the Sauget plant.

Throughout much of their history, PCBs were used n such products as carbonless copy paper, fire resistant hydraulic fluids, heat transfer fluids and plasticizers, Harbison said.

However, since the substance's environmental impact was discovered in the early 1970s, Monsanto has limited production to electrical insulation uses only.

"**THIS RESTRICTED** sales policy reduced Monsanto's annual PCB production by over 50 per cent and further eliminated the likely sources of losses to the environment," Harbison said.

Before 1971, the firm manufactured 85 million pounds of the substance a year. After that, production was reduced to 27 million pounds annually, a spokesman for the firm said.

In recent years the company has also taken extra steps to make sure PCBs were not accidentally introduced into the environment and has operated an incinerator to destroy PCB waste liquids.

Harbison said the chemical industry has zeroed in on replacements for PCBs that are currently being field tested.

HE ADDED that the proposed replacements are not thought to offer a comparable degree of fire resistance.

"The problem is twofold," Harbison said. "Industry has relatively little experience using fire resistant fluids in these applications and because fire resistant PCBs have always been used, there has never been a need until now to address the question, 'What degree of fire resistance is acceptable?'

"The fact is that no standard exists to guide users in their evaluations," he added.

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