Monsanto

PCB / PR

FROM (NAME – LOCATION – PHONE): D. R. Bishop - A3NB

DATE: January 9, 1979

SUBJECT:

REFERENCE:

TO: Messrs: E. H. Harbison - C2SA
L. A. Miller - B3SA
J. T. Nolan - D1A
R. G. Potter - B3SB
M. C. Throdahl - D1D

cc: G. F. Barton - A3NC
P. P. Fried - 1650
J. F. Hussey - 1920
G. D. Ingenthron - A3NB
[redacted]
W. J. McCarville - A3NC
J. E. McKee - A3NB
J. P. Mieure - T3B

Dr. James Mieure and I were interviewed at length yesterday for a documentary TV program being produced for the NOVA series on PBS.

The primary subject was PCBs but the discussions also touched on product testing, hazardous waste and the Chemical Facts of Life program.

The PCB portion was pretty much typical of what we have experienced in the past. The interviewer was not hostile -- (but he did have a beard). The session was not an adversary proceeding, but the questions were not all easy either. A few examples:

Question to Dr. Mieure: There have been reports of PCBs being detected in mothers' milk. Is this dangerous to the mother or the child?

Answer: I'm an analytical chemist -- not a toxicologist -- and I really couldn't comment.

Question to D. Bishop: If Monsanto made all the hundreds of thousands of pounds of PCBs that are now in the environment, isn't it your responsibility to clean up the mess?

Answer: We are proud of our record in the PCB issue and feel that we have acted at all times in a socially responsible manner. I then cited the major steps we took and concluded by saying that we did not feel that we should be held accountable for the actions of others -- actions which were clearly beyond our control.

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Question to D. Bishop: Your critics have charged that instead of spending large sums of money to propagandize the benefits of chemicals, you should do a better job of testing your products for safety.

Answer: The response to our Chemical Facts of Life program has been overwhelmingly favorable. A few critics -- Ralph Nader and Dr. Sam Epstein -- would have the world believe that all chemicals are bad and that the industry is engaged in a great "Watergate" type conspiracy. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We don't say "All chemicals are good or safe all the time, everywhere." Indeed, we say "No chemical is safe all the time, everywhere." We felt it was necessary to speak out in an attempt to bring a balanced perspective to the risk/benefit issue of chemicals. If we don't -- who will?

Question to D. Bishop: Has the public been unnecessarily alarmed by the environmentalists and the media?

Answer: I think we tend to not give the public sufficient credit. There have been attempts to alarm them but I doubt that they believe all they read and hear.

The real danger in all these charges and claims -- the fear is that the public could become complacent -- even blasé.

With all the reports about carcinogens in drinking water and saccharin and broiling hamburgers -- people could easily rationalize that they are going to get cancer anyway, so they might just as well continue smoking cigarettes -- a documented health hazard -- and that would be tragic!.

The program, which is currently scheduled to air next June on PBS, will address the whole issue of toxic substances, Tosca and the environment. The crew will interview Dr. Bumb at Dow next week.

Incidentally, they are interviewing Barry Commoner today. As we were winding up yesterday's session, the producer asked me if I had any suggestions that might help prepare him for the Commoner interview. He said he had read the Commoner piece on the evils of petrochemicals in the New York Sunday Times. I provided the

producer with rebuttal information which was lifted from a letter Mr. Throdahl had sent to Margaret Bush Wilson on this subject earlier.

I trust that, armed with this information, the interview with Commoner could be "lively."

Dan R. Bishop

DRB:ec