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Scientists Seek Pollutant Duty

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ROME — A group of 40 earth and natural scientists meeting here is considering an appeal to the United States government for ocean pollution information refused them by an American corporation.

Edward D. Goldberg, professor of chemistry at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography at La Jolla, California, said the action was being considered as part of a new program to get at the scientific secrets of marine pollution.

The Monsanto Corporation has refused all appeals from world scientists to reveal production figures for polychlorinated biphenyls, better known as PCB's, he said.

Production figures, Goldberg continued, are needed to help compute the amount of PCB's leaking into the environment through industry.

Second in Abundance

The polychlorinated biphenyls may be the second most abundant synthetic organic chemical in nature following DDT, he said.

Goldberg spoke at a press conference called to mark the opening here yesterday of a technical conference on marine pollution and its effects on living resources and fishing. The meeting of 500 experts from 50 nations is being sponsored by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

Action on PCB's developed in a seminar of international scientists convened by Goldberg in conjunction with the larger conference to study means for monitoring, detecting and measuring pollutants in the waters of the world.

Monsanto is the sole producer of PBC's in the United States, which is the center of world production, but other companies produce the chemicals in other nations, Goldberg said. The PCB's have been in production since the 1930s, but their absorption by fish and other marine life was discovered only recently and by accident in a Swedish study aimed at detecting DDT in marine life.

Used in Production

The PCB's are used widely in the production of plastics, electrical energy transformer fluids and solvents for paints, among other things.

It is not known how the chemical has leaked into the ecology, Goldberg said.

The scientists in the seminar here are preparing an appeal to governments to provide production figures on PBC's. In this way they hope to force the hand of the American government. According to Goldberg, Monsanto, under American law, is permitted to maintain its production figures as a secret because it is the country's sole producer of PCB's.

The special seminar, which has also touched on other sea pollution problems, found that:

—It is possible to tag with radioactive substances, fluorescent dyes and chemicals the petroleum cargoes of ocean going tankers so that spillage and dumping can be traced.

—Regional and world monitoring systems are needed to set in motion controls to protect the oceans.

—The major controls are handicapped now by ignorance not only of the effects of pollution but also of basic marine life.

Goldberg said that man has been successful in only one area of sea pollution control — disposal of radioactive substances.

Goldberg said American scientists generally are opposed to the use of detergents, chalks, dispersants and other chemicals to handle oil spillage. Because they often threaten marine life more than the oil itself.

Recommendations of the conference in the technical field will go to the United Nations environment conference in Stockholm in 1972, according to Roy I. Jackson, assistant director general of FAO for fisheries.

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