STLCOPCB403629A

136330 MSD

2nd Toxic Chemical Leak Worries Attorney General

By H.J. Jackson
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

The release of a small amount of a toxic chemical on Sunday may affect talks between the Illinois attorney general's office and the Monsanto Co. on safety measures at Monsanto's Sauget plant, an assistant attorney general says.

About three gallons, or 48 pounds, of a toxic chemical leaked at the W.G. Krummrich Plant in Sauget on Sunday. East St. Louis officials reported that 254 people visited area emergency rooms after the leak, most of them complaining about respiratory problems.

Assistant Attorney General Joseph F. Madonia said Tuesday that he has been negotiating with Monsanto since April because of a spill that occurred then. The talks are designed to reach agreement on new safety measures at the plant. Agreements that would avoid litigation over the spill in April had nearly concluded, he said.

But the spill Sunday occurred in the same part of the plant as the accident in April, Madonia said.

"We were right in the middle of talking about that, negotiating details of a program that would minimize those types of incidents," Madonia said. "No decision has been made about what to do about Sunday's incident. We don't know if it will have any bearing on the negotiations."

Monsanto representatives said the company was not required to sound an alarm over Sunday's chemical leak. The amount released was below the amount required to sound an alarm under a previous agreement with state officials.

Even so, company officials said they said they sounded the alarm — a siren that alerts nearby residents to chemical emergencies — as a precaution.

A spokesman for Monsanto said Tuesday, "We will continue to negotiate and will cooperate with the (attorney general's) office as we have in the past." He declined to comment further.

> **"From our perspective, it shouldn't be happening in the first place."**
>
> JOSEPH F. MADONIA, assistant attorney general.

But Madonia said, "If Monsanto is reporting when they don't have to, that's a good thing."

Nevertheless, he added, "A few of the people who went to the hospital really were affected" by noxious fumes on Sunday.

"From our perspective, it shouldn't be happening in the first place," Madonia said. "They have to come up with a way to keep the dangerous chemicals where they're supposed to be."

On April 17, about 300 gallons of phosphorous trichloride was spilled at the Monsanto plant in Sauget when a railroad tank car was overfilled. About 60 area residents, most of them from the Rush City area at the southern end of East St. Louis, were treated that day at hospitals for respiratory problems after the vapor drifted to them.

On Sunday, a pressure seal on a tank failed and released three gallons of the same chemical. A smaller cloud of vapor also drifted into the Rush City area.

East St. Louis officials said some of the people who visited the emergency rooms on Sunday may have been seeking cash settlements from Monsanto but weren't really seriously affected by the fumes. Mayor Carl E. Officer said that anyone who was seeking compensation wrongly would just hurt the credibility of those who deserved help.