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Firm will abandon PCB's

ST. LOUIS (UPI) — Monsanto Co. announced Monday it plans to phase out the manufacture of a toxic group of chemicals known as PCBs, which environmentalists contend are threatening public health and the nation's rivers and lakes.

F. J. Fitzgerald, a corporate vice president, said he could not give an exact timetable for the phase-out but "it would be in a planned and orderly manner."

"As soon as we are satisfied that the electrical power supply industry's needs for usable, acceptable alternate dielectric fluids have been met, by whomsoever, Monsanto will voluntarily shut down its PCB manufacturing

unit," Fitzgerald said.

Monsanto is the sole maker of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyl, which is used primarily as a nonconductor of direct electrical current. The chemical has been a necessary ingredient in most powergenerating equipment.

PCBs have been used in manufacturing processes since 1890, but their presence as toxic substances in the environment was not detected until 1968 because they were confused with DDT, with which they have a similar chemical structure.

At a conference on PCBs last November in Chicago, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel P. Reed re-

commended the federal government impose a nearly total ban on the chemical.

Reed said he was "deeply shocked by the pervasiveness of PCBs; they are literally everywhere." He said exceedingly high levels of PCBs were found in fish from all parts of the country, indicating the nation's rivers and lakes were "in mortal danger."

PCBs have caused liver cancer and reproductive failures in laboratory animals and some workers using the chemicals have complained of allergic reactions, according to federal officials.

Environmental groups had petitioned the government to lower the permissible levels

of PCBs in food on grounds the chemicals are a cancer hazard.

Monsanto said it has informed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its capacitor and transformer industry customer of its decision to eventually phase out the chemicals.

"Monsanto has been working for a number of years on non-PCB replacement products," Fitzgerald said.

"The problems that we face collectively are rooted in the unique fire resistant and dielectric characteristics of PCBs, and the irreplaceable role they have played in electrical and industrial applications for the past 40 years."

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