

NEWS

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Monsanto

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MONSANTO ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF DIOXIN SAMPLING

ST. LOUIS, Jan. 9 -- Monsanto Company said today that low levels of dioxin have been found in two old and essentially idle buildings at its John F. Queeny Plant in St. Louis. Company medical officials said that these isolated areas of contamination do not present a hazard to employees, the public or the environment.

According to Queeny plant manager, George F. Knollmeyer, 15 composite samples, obtained from scraping encrusted grit from beams, crevices and cracks in several structures and taken from soil beneath paved areas, were tested. Twelve of these samples either detected no dioxin or levels below one part per billion (ppb). Only three of the 15 samples revealed levels above one ppb; the highest was 21 ppb, the others were 2 ppb and 3 ppb.

Mr. Knollmeyer explained that relatively small quantities of the herbicide 2,4,5-T were shipped to the Queeny Plant at various times between 1949 and 1964 for further processing. It is now known that this herbicide can contain dioxin as an unwanted contaminant. "However," he continued, "2,4,5-T was never manufactured at Queeny and thus, no dioxin was ever generated here."

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Mr. Knollmeyer pointed out that until recently it was thought that dioxin broke down rapidly into harmless materials. "However, findings learned from the Missouri dioxin experience during 1983 made it clear that dioxin can remain in the environment for years, bound tightly to other substances. Based on these new findings, the plant decided to search for dioxin in virtually every nook and cranny in areas where it likely might be found," he said.

George Roush, M.D., director of Monsanto's Department of Medicine and Environmental Health, said there is no evidence to suggest that any Queeny Plant employee has ever been adversely affected by dioxin. "The plant, which has extensive medical records dating to the early 1950s, has never experienced a known case of chloracne, the acne-like skin condition commonly associated with dioxin exposure," he said.

Dr. Roush added that the "one part per billion" safety guideline recommended by the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) was intended for residential sites only and does not apply to industrial locations.

"The guideline is based on the highly unlikely assumption that a small child would eat one gram of dioxin-contaminated soil every day for several years while at the same time being exposed to another gram every day through skin contact. This obviously does not apply to any past or present situation at Queeny," Dr. Roush said.