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PCB

Monsanto only U.S. maker

Monsanto Company is the only maker of the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the United States, but the Greenville textile unit of the Monsanto has nothing to do with the chemical according to a St. Louis, Mo., spokesman.

Mike Blatz, "director of spokesmanship" for Monsanto Company, said the Monsanto Chemical Company is the only U.S. manufacturer of PCBs "but an awful lot is imported."

"We have been saying for several years that we were getting out of the business but that hasn't kept the Germans and Japanese from making PCBs," Blatz said.

Blatz said he did not know whether his company supplies PCBs to Sangamo Electric Co. of Pickens, which has been identified as a source of the dangerously high levels of PCBs found in fish taken from Lake Hartwell and Twelve Mile Creek.

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"If it's a closed system it is possible they could be one of our customers. We cut off most of our sales of PCB several years ago because of the recognized danger of the chemical not being used properly," he said.

Monsanto now sells PCB for use only in closed electrical systems, he said.

"For 10 to 12 years we, as have others, have been trying to develop other fire resistant coolants," but, Blatz said, no one has had success.

"The thing that makes the PCBs so dangerous to ecology is that they don't break down. That's the same thing that makes them important in electrical systems. Should there be a short circuit in the unit cooled by PCBs, there won't be a fire."

Blatz said a major customer for the company's PCB production is the United States Navy.

"The Navy says that on shipboard electrical systems they want something that is fire resistant.

"You've got to ask yourself, which is worse—and the Navy says it is worth the risk of using it."

In addition to electrical systems on ships, Blatz said the fire resistant coolant is used in electrical systems in the higher floors of tall buildings as a fire preventative.

"There's been a lot of hurrah and suspicion, but it just isn't clear cut. Rather than get involved, Monsanto decided to supply only for the closed systems. We've never tried to foster the use of PCBs."

The company used to supply PCB for use in manufacture of carbonless carbon paper, Blatz said, "but we've been out of that market for years."

According to Blatz, there have never been any problems in the manufacture of the chemical. "The safety record of chemical plants is as much as 15 times as safe as any other industry," Blatz said.

"We have built up a healthy respect over the years. We've never had a citation or anything. We've always recognized it (PCB) as a chemical and you just don't dump or flush down the drain things like that," he said.

As far as caution in the manufacture of PCB, "we worry as much about it as we do any other chemical," Blatz said.

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