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Monsanto To Drop Insulating Fluid

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co., the only U.S. manufacturer of the controversial PCB insulating fluids, announced Tuesday that it will quit producing the fluids by late next year.

Earle H. Harbison Jr., general manager of Monsanto's specialty chemicals division, said the firm will complete distribution of all inventories and withdraw completely from the market no later than Oct. 31, 1977.

The target date would be even sooner, Harbison said, but electrical transformer and capacitor manufacturers have said they would be unable to convert to other materials any earlier.

PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) is a stable, fire-resistant chemical that is used widely in transformers and capacitors.

"Unfortunately," Harbison said, "the very properties that have made PCBs ideal and even mandatory for these essential uses, were also found in the early 1970s to be the properties causing them to persist and accumulate in the environment."

PCB has been blamed as a major source of pollution in New York's Hudson River.

The New York Environmental Conservation Department and the General Electric Co. reached agreement recently for GE to contribute some $3 million toward the cost of cleaning PCBs from the Hudson. The agreement came after a lengthy hearing over leakage of PCBs from GE plants at Fort Edwards and Hudson Falls, N.Y., into the Hudson.

The accumulation of PCBs in waterways, Harbison said, triggered the firm's decision to cease production as soon as the electrical industry could find alternate fluids and convert its equipment and components to their use.