FROM: G.F. BARTON

JULY 23, 1975

TO: W.B. PAPAGEORGE -- B2SK
D. WOOD -- B2SD

A LITTLE FRESH AIR ON THE SUBJECT OF PCBs.

93-196 ORGANIC
GARDENING & FARMING
MO. 820,000

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Avoiding the Plastic Problem

Dear Sir:

Two points which I feel should be raised about Wayne Davis' article, "Modern Living Without Garbage Service" (April OGF): People should not get the idea from the article that burning plastic waste is the best way to dispose of it. PCBs, deadly chemical compounds related to DDT, are released in the combustion process and end up in fish, which are eaten by birds. That results in reproductive failure as occurs with DDT and DDE. Plastic is recyclable, however, there are different types of plastic which must be separated according to grades before melting down can proceed.

So recycling of plastic remains in the future. The best way of avoiding the plastic problem is to simply stop it at the source – do not buy anything which is made from or wrapped in plastic. In general, try to avoid the normal marketing system. Plastic is made of scarce fossil fuel, and causes environmental degradation at some point of its existence.

DAVID FALLOW
Potomac, Maryland

DR. DAVIS REPLIES: *As I said in my article, disposal of plastic and paper packaging is the least satisfactory part of our system; burning destroys these resources and pollutes the air. I agree we should minimize purchases of overpackaged products and plastic packaging.*

There should not be any PCBs in the plastic I burn. According to Environmental Science and Technology *(Oct. 1970), "The Monsanto Co. stated recently in a letter to Congressman William F. Ryan of New York that as of August 30, it would no longer sell PCBs to customers for use in general plasticizer operations where disposal of the end product cannot be controlled. After some lag period – the time it takes to eventually dispose of the products made from PCBs and currently in processor's inventories – the quantity of PCBs getting into the environment may be substantially reduced. If Monsanto's former customers look for PCB substitutes, rather than purchasing PCBs from manufacturers in Japan and Europe, the projected decrease could become a reality."*

Monsanto is the sole producer of PCBs in the U.S. If Mr. Fallow has evidence that PCBs are in household plastics, he should let us know. //

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