

Q: WHAT'S MONSANTO'S RECORD REGARDING PCBs?

- A: PCBs were identified in the environment by a Swedish scientist in the late 1960's. Monsanto immediately undertook research programs to determine whether they were present in the U.S. environment. Monsanto also defined test procedures for PCB analysis and undertook animal-feeding studies to evaluate health effects.

Beginning in the 1970s, we notified customers and users and publicized potential environmental problems and the need to prevent entry of PCBs into the environment. By early 1972 after scientific investigations had confirmed the presence of PCBs in the U.S. environment, Monsanto terminated sales of PCB to all non-electrical (open) applications and aided customers in replacing and disposing of Monsanto products containing PCBs. A blue-ribbon Interdepartmental Task Force on PCBs endorsed Monsanto's actions, and found continued sales for use in electrical equipment to be required for safety reasons and to prevent disruption of electrical service. Fire insurance, building and electrical codes in many parts of the country traditionally required use of PCBs as an electrical insulator in the transformers for use in areas of high population as a safety measure. Although no substitute dielectric fluid was then (1972) commercially available, Monsanto announced its intention of withdrawing PCBs from the market as soon as a suitable replacement was available to industry.

In October, 1976, Monsanto announced a phase-out of the PCB business. Monsanto's timetable for withdrawal had the endorsement of the federal government.

Monsanto production of PCB was stopped in July, 1977, and all shipments to customers were completed by the end of October, 1977. The manufacturing equipment was thoroughly cleaned, dismantled and buried in a hazardous waste landfill in early 1978 (in Sheffield, Illinois).

Q: WHY ALL THE CONCERN ABOUT PCBs? DO THEY CAUSE CANCER?

- A: The hazards of PCBs to humans have been greatly exaggerated. PCBs are not cancer-causing agents and they are not deadly toxins. PCBs are considered only mildly toxic on an acute basis when ingested by humans -- about on the same order as common table salt. There has never been a single documented case where PCBs caused serious chronic human health problems including cancer, cardiovascular or neurological problems. The most common human health effect is dermatitis which is reversible on cessation of exposure. In fact, an extensive scientific review of more than two dozen health studies dealing with human exposures to PCBs failed to show a link between the chemical and human cancer. The animal studies which have been performed consistently have shown PCBs can cause skin irritation, and repeated, prolonged exposure can produce liver injury in test animals. These studies, and basic common sense, indicate that exposure to PCBs -- or any industrial chemical -- should be avoided.