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Monsanto phasing out PCBs

Monsanto Co. will phase out production of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) at its Sauget, Ill., plant, a company spokesman has announced.

Monsanto is the only American manufacturer of PCBs, a group of chemicals that are almost indestructible and are considered a health hazard by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

HOWEVER, Monsanto officials did not set a deadline for phasing out PCB production. That will depend on when and if PCB buyers agree to switch to some other chemical to replace PCB, the company spokesman said.

PCBs, which are extremely flame-resistant, are used mainly as insulating fluids in electrical equipment such as high-power transformers.

Monsanto and several other companies plan to introduce chemicals that could replace PCBs. The Monsanto chemical is being tested by potential buyers now, the spokesman said.

The phaseout announcement, while indefinite, "tells buyers they better start looking for alternatives," the spokesman said.

Monsanto has decreased production during the last few years.

EPA ADMINISTRATOR Russell E. Train said last month that PCBs should be controlled "with every means at our disposal."

Train said PCB levels above those allowed by the Food and Drug Administration have been found in fish from the Great Lakes, the Hudson River, the upper Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean off Southern California.

The EPA estimates about 300 million pounds of the indestructible chemical have been dumped into landfills, leaked into water supplies and allowed to sift into production sites.

It is thought to cause reproductive failures, gastric disorders and skin lesions in mammals.

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