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Spectrum

UNDER PRESSURE from Congressman William Ryan (Dem., N.Y.) tha Monsanto Company has somewhat curtailed sales of its polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). It will not discontinue manufacturing any of the products, however, contrary to its earlier statements.

In Environment, January-February 1970, the hazards of PCBs were described. PCBs resemble DDT chemically, are at least as persistent in the environment, are nearly as widespread, and pose similar hazards to wildlife. Congressman Ryan, after reading the article, issued a statement in which he called for "immediate action to prevent what may well be a major ecological disaster."

On April 10, the day of Ryan's announcement, Monsanto issued a statement in which they said, "Steps have been taken to...replace those grades of PCB which linger in nature." Monsanto claimed this action had been planned well before the Environment article appeared. In response to questions, Monsanto wrote to Environment, "(Substitutes) are being developed to replace those grades (of PCBs) which have been appearing in the environment..." but refused to give details on what the new products would be and which PCBs would be discontinued.

In response to continued pressure from Congressman Ryan, Monsanto issued a new statement July 16 in which they said the use of PCBs, of which they are the sole U.S. manufacturer, would be restricted after August 30, 1970. In a telephone interview a Monsanto spokesman acknowledged that, despite the earlier announcement, the company planned to continue manufacturing all grades of PCBs, but that these would not be sold to customers who might use them in ways which would, in Monsanto's opinion, allow their release into the environment. The spokesman refused to estimate how much PCB sales might be reduced by such action.

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