Monsanto

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PCB REGULATORY HISTORY FACT SHEET

Polychlorinated biphenyls or PCBs, used principally as flame-retardant fluids in electrical equipment, are among the most regulated compounds in the U.S. Concern about PCBs' environmental persistence and health effects dates from the late 1960's. Prior to this, PCBs were regarded as highly beneficial chemicals, prized for their stability and fire resistance. For more than 40 years, their use was required in most high-rise buildings, schools and hospitals where the risk of electrical fires or explosions were major concerns.

Below is a brief history of PCB concerns and regulation:

1966 - A Swedish scientist, using a new analytical technique, suggested the presence of PCBs in fish.

1968 - About 1,000 Japanese in Yusho became ill from eating rice oil alledgedly contaminated with

high levels of Japanese-produced PCBs. (Later scientific work showed that the cause of the illness was not PCBs per se but rather other contaminants present in the oil.)

1970 - PCBs were identified as persistent chemicals in the U.S. environment.

1976 - The Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) was enacted; it includes provisions for the total regulation of PCBs.

1979 - EPA issued two PCB regulations under TSCA. One prescribed labeling and disposal practices; the other covers PCB uses and the manufacture, processing and distribution of PCBs.

1980 - The U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., acting on a suit brought against EPA's 1979 regulations by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), ruled that EPA did not present adequate evidence to support its determination of totally "enclosed" uses or the agency's decision to exclude from regulation all PCB concentrations below 50 parts per million. The court ordered EPA to draft new rules on these issues.

1981 - The court granted an 18-month stay of its order to allow continued use of PCBs in electrical equipment so that EPA could develop new PCB rules substantiated by sufficient evidence.

1982 - The anticipated schedule for EPA's new PCB regulations is:

August - final rules on totally "enclosed" uses;

October - final rules on "closed" and "controlled" processes;

November - EPA to inform the court of final plans for issuing rules on "uncontrolled PCBs."

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