1. ~~Gary Burton~~
2. ~~David Wood~~
3. Rci (ref) - file

VISIT REPORT

May 18, 1977.

HAINAUT-SAMBRE
6090 Couillet
Belgium.

Called on	: A. Dumont - ACEC Adjoint Direction des Ventes Dr. Mullier - ACEC Physician.
Also present from Hainaut-Sambre	: J. Caulier Directeur Exploitation M. Debay Chef de Sécurité M. Lesir Chef de Service Laboratoires M. Nicaise Chef du Service Juridique P. Nicholas Chef de Service Electroméchanique Laminoirs V. Verclaye Directeur Général Dr. A. Wustefeld Physician
Present from Monsanto	: A. Arpino N.G.H. Thomas.

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Discussion.

We were introduced to all present after which Mr. Verclaye left the meeting. We stated that ACEC Ghent had advised us today 18.5.77 of the transformer explosion and subsequent problem at Hainaut-Sambre involving the di-electric fluid-Pyroclor. As supplier of the fluid to ACEC we were present at the meeting only as advisers to ACEC.

The transformer exploded on April 22, 77 and was split open vertically splashing fluid on walls. 2000 liters of the estimated 2600 litres content of the transformer found its way into the drain and subsequently into the dead end canal alongside.

Repairs were being carried out on the transformer at the ACEC Ghent works. In a recent visit to establish how repairs were proceeding, ACEC personnel asked the Hainaut-Sambre people present what measures had been taken to dispose of the (askarel) Pyroclor. It was at this time Friday May 13,1977 that Hainaut-Sambre realised that a problem existed.

It became apparent that the authorities had not yet been advised of the incident. We stressed to Dr. Mullier that our recommendation was that the authorities be notified at once.

When requested for advice by the Hainaut-Sambre people on how to remove the PCB from the canal, we stated that as fluid supplier we were only able to advise on disposal and safe handling of the product itself.

At this stage we left the meeting for about 15 minutes during which ACEC and Hainaut-Sambre held further discussions. Dr. Mullier advised us after that Hainaut-Sambre were about to inform the authorities of the incident.

Dr. Mullier now took us to visit the canal site (see diagram A). Also present were Mr. Caulier and Mr. Nicholas. We advised Dr. Mullier to have all sand, rags, earth, etc. contaminated with PCB to be collected in drums for disposal in the approved manner. We also suggested to Dr. Mullier that Monsanto would be willing to test water samples collected by ACEC to determine PCB content.

Enclosed is a copy of the preparedness statement readied by PR to assist in responding to any press or external enquiries we receive. All media contacts should be referred to P. Whippy.

A. Arpino

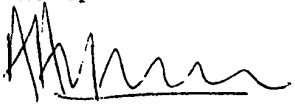
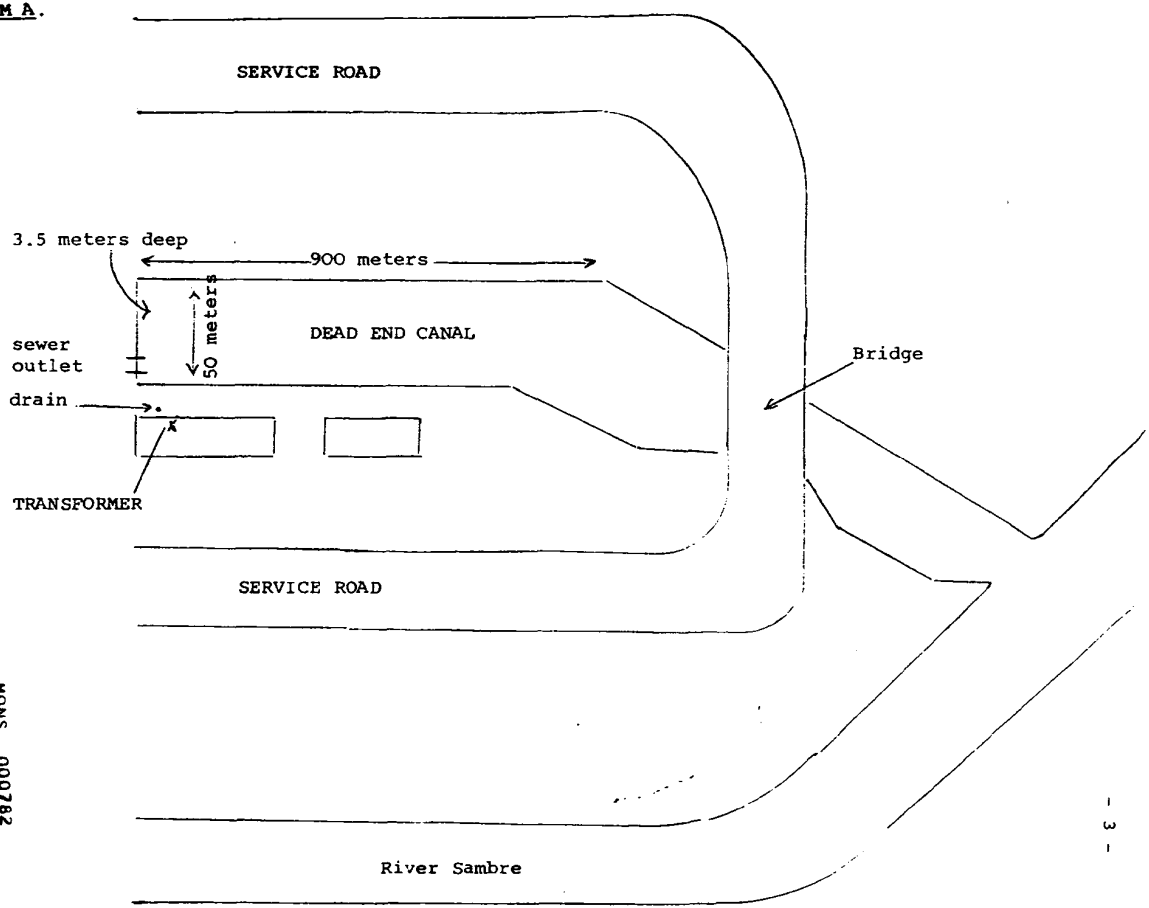


DIAGRAM A.



MONS 000782

FURTHER COMMENTS. (not part of the meeting)

From an environmental viewpoint the water level in the basin is maintained by the height of the river. After the recent heavy rains the Sambre must be presumed to be above average height and in the coming months there could be a reduction of a foot or two in the depth of water in the basin. Each foot represents about 8 % of the water in the basin or 14000 tonnes.

The temperature of this water was said to be about 15° C (59° F) already, and will rise in the summer to 25° C (77° F) ; these high figures result from discharged process water and waste heat from the rolling mill. We were told that there are no fish in the Sambre in the neighbourhood of Charleroi but fish (trout) were to be found towards Namur - "upstream" of Charleroi. The map shows on the contrary that Namur is downstream and any PCB escaping from the basin will come into contact with the fish.

According to Hector Dekelver the Meuse is a source of drinking water, and the Maas is used for water supply in Holland. About fifteen barges have been in the basin since the 22nd April and their propellors will have contributed to mixing the PCB. To close the basin to traffic would mean closing the rolling mill as this is the RM receiving and FP despatch point.

If the 2000 litres spreads to a film 2 mm thick an area of 1000 m2 would be covered with PCB - about 2 % of the basin. Any reduction in film thickness means a corresponding increase in area. If anything can be done the time is now whilst the river is penning the water back in the basin, and while the water temperature is still relatively low.

On the other hand telephoned advice from Cole Weber St. Louis is that the Pyroclor be left where it is. In a similar case in the Seattle area $2 M were spent in trying to remove a spill from the bay but all that was achieved was an aggravation of the problem. The Pyroclor is probably lying in a pool and will tend to absorb onto the silt and stay there. It is probable that the amount dissolved in the water would be barely discernible above the background level for PCB's in the environment.

This may be demonstrable by sampling the water from various points in the basin over the next few months.

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The Pyroclor from the explosion spattered buildings roads and paths and this material was absorbed on sandy soil and was dumped on waste ground nearby. The smell of product was strong. It has rained heavily in the past three weeks and no doubt a lot of Pyroclor has been leached out by the rain already. We emphasized strongly to Mullier that the material must be collected into leakproof containers and disposed of in the approved manner. If in doubt he should consult us.

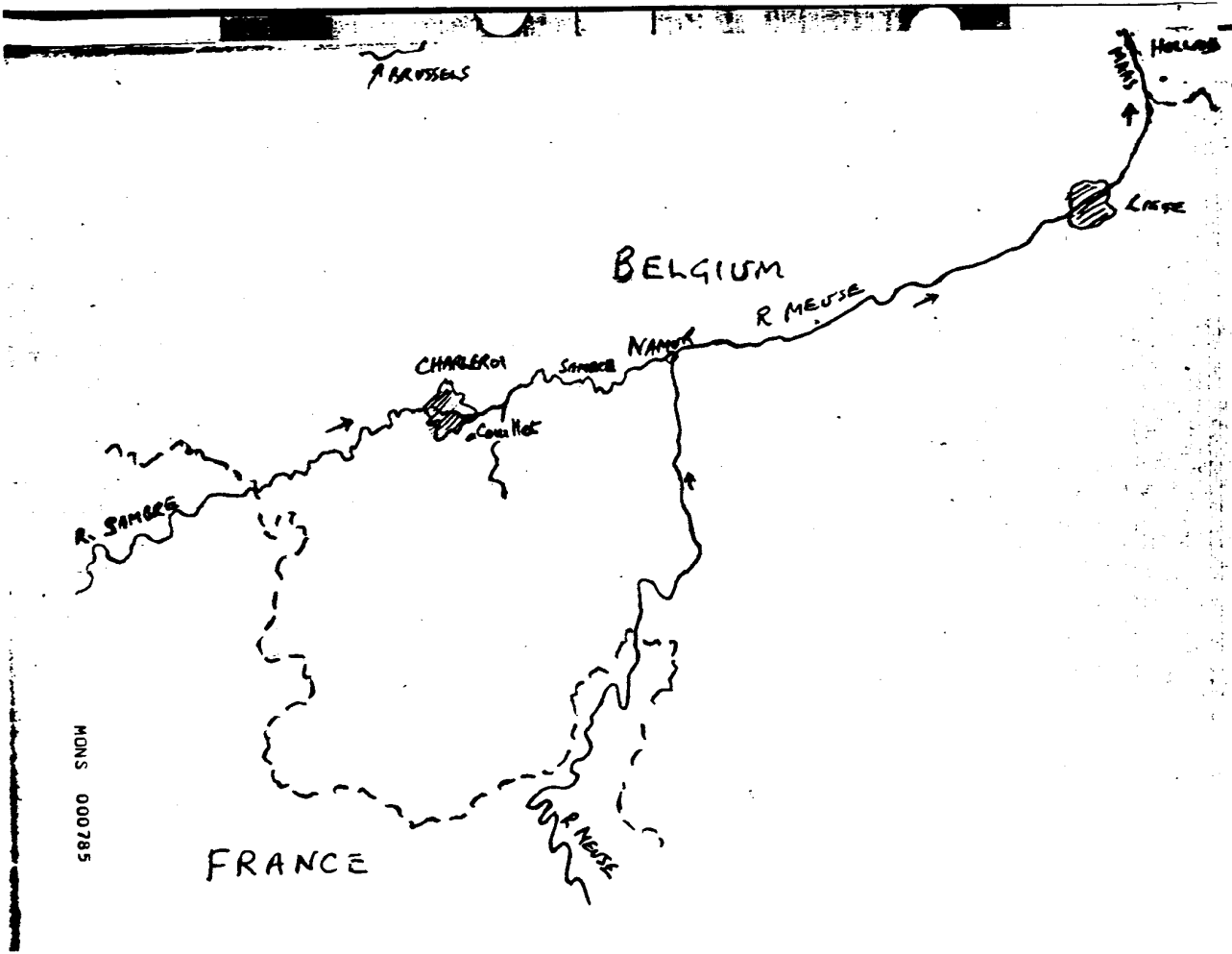
Recommendations :

1) If our advice is sought, we recommend the Pyroclor be left where it is as the least evil.

2) We confirm our offer to co-operate with ACEC in examining samples of water from the basin.

3) We confirm our recommendation that the spill area be cleaned up urgently and the waste disposed of in the approved manner.

N.G.H. Thomas.


BRUSSELS
HOLLAND
MAAS
LIEGE
BELGIUM
R MEUSE
NAMUR
SAMBRE
CHARLEROI
Couillet
R. SAMBRE
R MEUSE
FRANCE

MONS 000785

STATEMENT TO RESPOND TO PRESS OR OTHER EXTERNAL INQUIRIES CONCERNING PCB SPILLAGE INTO A CANAL ENTERING THE RIVER SAMBRE

We were informed by one of our customers, Ateliers de Constructions Electriques de Charleroi S.A. (ACEC), on Wednesday afternoon (May 18) that there had been a spillage of Pyroclor polychlorinated biphenyl transformer fluid (PCB) in the Charleroi area.

We understand the fluid leaked into a canal after the rupture of an electrical transformer supplied by ACEC, which was operating in a steel rolling mill at the premises of the Hainaut Sambre Company at Couillet near Charleroi. The transformer was situated alongside a short stretch of a cul de sac canal nearly 1,000 metres from the entrance to the Sambre.

Two Monsanto representatives went to the site to assist ACEC personnel in dealing with the incident.

ACEC was advised to inform the local health and water authorities that there had been a spillage.

20/5/77
Draft III
Peter W. Whippy

ANSWERS TO ASSIST IN RESPONDING TO FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS ON PCB SPILLAGE IN BELGIUM

Q. How toxic are PCBs ?

A. PCBs are not very toxic to humans, but are harmful by ingestion, inhalation or skin contact and will cause irritation of skin and eyes.
Unfortunately, PCBs are a cumulative pollutant, especially to marine environment. They are not readily biodegradable and studies have shown that PCBs are injurious to certain forms of bird, aquatic and animal life.

Q. What is the effect on humans who drink water contaminated with PCBs ?

A. PCBs are very slightly soluble in water. The immediate effect on humans would be minimal - even at high concentrations. The same comment applies to animals or birds drinking contaminated water. The principal problem is that PCBs accumulate in the eco-cycle and can enter the food chain.

Q. What is the effect on humans who eat fish or meat containing PCBs ?

A. There would be no immediate effect. We would emphasis that PCBs are not very toxic to humans, but obviously it would be inadvisable to eat any fish suspected of PCB contamination. Please bear in mind that this spill occured at the dead end of a stretch of industrial canal water unlikely to contain edible fish.

Q. How much went into the canal ?

A. We understand the spillage is about 2,000 liters and that it happened April 22.

Q. Does this mean that PCBs can get into local drinking water supplies ?

A. We don't know at this stage since we have no detailed information on the spillage. Suggest you contact ACEC for the latest information.

Q. Is this spillage dangerous to health ?

A. We repeat, PCBs are not very toxic to humans, but ingestion, inhalation or skin contact should be avoided since it causes irritation of skin and eyes.

Q. Do you manufacture PCBs in Belgium ?

A. No. PCBs are manufactured by Monsanto in the United Kingdom and USA, but the company is withdrawing from the market and shutting down its production. This was announced by the company last year and we will not make or market PCBs after October 31 (1977). Monsanto's withdrawal from the PCBs market was decided upon voluntarily by the company after research indicated that the chemical was finding its way into the environment and persisting.

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Q. Are your customers given information about the toxic nature of this product and action to be taken in the event of an accident or spillage ?

A. Yes. Multi-lingual warning labels are affixed to containers which are special reinforced drums. These labels give a brief description of the nature of the material and appropriate action to be taken in the event of a spill or leak. Technical documentation and advice is also given to PCB customers.

Q. Have the Belgian Health and Water Authorities been notified of the spillage ?

A. The customer ACEC has been advised to do so and report actions taken by them to contain the spill. Monsanto will provide any technical advice requested.

ends

20/5/77
Draft III
Peter W. Whippy

Distribution

c.c. :

G.C. Alberini - Bru
C. Andréopoulos / A. Claeys - Bru
H.A. Vodden - Lln
J. Cole Weber - St. Louis
H. Dekelver - DSO Antwerp
R.C. Isham - St. Louis
R.C. Lebrett - Bru
J. Mason - Bru
A. Munn - Bru
F. Poulos - Bru
P. Whippy / J.D. Carr - Bru
D. Wood - St. Louis