

NEWS

Monsanto

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NO EXCESS IN CANCER DEATHS FOUND IN
LARGEST GROUP EVER STUDIED FOR
LONG TERM EFFECTS OF DIOXIN EXPOSURE

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 22 -- A standardized mortality analysis has been completed of a group of 121 workers believed to have been exposed to TCDD, one of a family of toxic impurities commonly called "dioxin," in an industrial accident 30 years ago at Monsanto Company's Nitro, W.Va., plant. The study found no apparent excess in deaths from cancer or cardiovascular disease. The total deaths observed (32) were also less than expected when compared to the national average.

The medical study was co-authored by Judith A. Zack, a Monsanto epidemiologist, and Raymond R. Suskind, M.D., Director of the Institute of Environmental Health at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center. A report of their findings will be published in the Journal of Occupational Medicine.

TCDD is sometimes formed as a trace contaminant during the production of certain industrial chemicals. One of these is the herbicide, 2,4,5-T, currently the subject of widespread controversy centering on its use in the defoliant "Agent Orange" in Vietnam and in agricultural applications in the United States and abroad.

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The 121 Monsanto workers involved in this study represent all of the employees who were exposed in the accident and who subsequently developed "chloracne," a skin disorder commonly associated with dioxin exposure. All 121 people were traced through plant medical records, workmen's compensation files and, where applicable, official death certificates. Thus, a complete follow-up was achieved.

According to the authors, the acute or short-term health effects of dioxin exposure are described in the literature but until now little has been known regarding the chronic or long-term effects. They stressed that this analysis is important in that "no apparent excess of total mortality or deaths from malignant neoplasms or disease of the circulatory system was observed in a group of workers with a high peak exposure to TCDD (dioxin) followed over a period of nearly 30 years."

The 1949 Nitro plant accident is the earliest recorded incident of dioxin exposure involving a population of this size. Since then, over 20 dioxin-related industrial accidents have occurred around the world, including a widely reported 1976 accident in Seveso, Italy.

Accordingly, the authors stated that the Nitro group represents the best opportunity thus far, in terms of people exposed and duration of latency period since exposure, to study the long-term effects of dioxin on mortality. Despite the relatively small number of deaths involved in the study, the authors said that by augmenting these data with with the results of comparable

mortality studies, the long-term effects of TCDD (dioxin) may be more definitely evaluated."

This study will become a part of a larger analysis of not only mortality data but also of health information gathered last June in examinations of over 400 present and former Nitro plant employees by Dr. Suskind and his medical team from the University of Cincinnati's Institute of Environmental Health.

Included in this larger study are both workers exposed during the 1949 accident and those not exposed at that time but who worked in the 2,4,5-T operation between 1948 when the unit started up and 1969 when Monsanto ceased production of the product. A control group of employees who worked in other areas of the plant during that time frame is also being studied for comparative purposes.

This extensive medical investigation is being directed by Dr. Suskind. His findings are expected to be published later this year or early next year.

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