Note to Editors: Sept. 11, 1980

PCBs AND CANCER -- WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

Recent reports that traces of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) have been found in some of the abandoned drums of waste discovered at a West St. Louis County construction site have referred to PCBs as "cancer-causing" and "deadly toxins." In one news account, the top environmental official of the State was actually quoted as saying, "PCBs definitely cause cancer." PCBs are not "human cancer-causing" agents and they are not "deadly" toxins.

Here are the facts;

- In 1975, Dr. Renate Kimbrough, of the Center for Disease Control, Public Health Service, Atlanta, Ga., reported that PCBs caused liver cancer in female rats fed for two years.

  This single study formed the basis for the "cancer-causing label" that has been put on PCBs by federal and state officials and a broad section of the news media ever since.

  Dr. Kimbrough's 1975 PCB study was subjected to extensive independent review by the Eppley Institute for Research in Cancer. This review did not concur with her diagnosis, i.e., her findings were not confirmed.

- In April of 1978, The National Cancer Institute published a report on an animal feeding study in which laboratory rats were fed PCBs for 105 weeks. NCI concluded that PCBs were not cancer-causing compounds as a result of this study. (Copy of the NCI news release is attached).

- Monsanto is aware of seven epidemiological studies done in the U.S. of groups of people exposed to PCBs. None of these studies found PCBs to cause cancer in humans.

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We in no way wish to minimize the very real environmental concerns associated with irresponsible disposal of wastes containing PCBs. The problems with PCBs center on the fact that they remain intact in the environment for many years and, after long-term exposure can be highly toxic to some forms of animal and aquatic life. They are considered only mildly toxic on an acute basis when ingested by humans -- about on the same order as common table salt.

In summary, there are enough real, legitimate concerns about potential environmental harm from PCBs without unnecessarily alarming the public with labels like "cancer-causing" and "deadly toxin."

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