

Note to Editors from Monsanto Company September 23, 1980

PCB HAZARDS -- FACTS & FALLACIES

In the decade of the 70's, Polychlorianted Biphenyls (PCBs) were frequently singled out by federal agencies, legislators, private interest groups and the news media as the symbolic example of why tough new toxic substance control regulations were needed in the United States. In the process, the hazards of PCBs were greatly exaggerated. Adjectives like "deadly toxins" and "potent cancer-causing agents" were and still are typically used to describe PCBs in government handouts and news stories.

This fact sheet is in no way intended to minimize the very real and acknowledged environmental concerns associated with irresponsible disposal of waste compounds containing PCBs, but rather to set the record straight on the human health hazards. PCBs are not human "cancer-causing agents" and they are not "deadly toxins." As a matter of fact, PCBs are considered only mildly toxic on an acute basis when ingested by humans -- about on the same order as common table salt.

The main problems with PCBs are environmental in scope. They remain intact in the land and the water for many years, resisting decomposition into innocuous compounds. At the same time, PCBs buildup (or bioaccumulate) in the fatty tissue of lower forms of animal and aquatic life that consume them -- eventually reaching highly toxic levels in these life forms.

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