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Monsanto halting PCB production

The only U.S. manufacturer of the toxic industrial pollutants polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), has announced it will stop production of the chemicals and shut down its manufacturing plant within three years.

Monsanto Co., a St. Louis-based firm which has been manufacturing PCBs since 1929, said production of the chemicals will stop because suitable substitutes are being developed.

PCBs, primarily used as insulators in electrical equipment because of their fire-resistant qualities, have come under fire recently as suspected causes of reproductive and organic defects in humans, fish, birds and animals.

The Ford administration this week asked Congress for legislation to control PCBs and other toxic chemicals. The federal government now has limited authority concerning chemical regulation.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated that 10 million pounds of PCBs escape into the environment each year. High levels of the chemicals were found this year in Lake Pepin and similar concentrations have been detected in the Great Lakes and some rivers.

Researchers say that more than 40 percent of all Americans probably have PCBs in their tissues.

According to Monsanto, the company has wanted to phase out production of the chemicals since 1970, when their persistence in the environment became known. The company cut off all sales of PCBs except to the electrical industry in 1971.

EPA Administrator Russell Train told a House environmental panel Wednesday that the PCB problem is only part of a bigger, more dismaying picture.

He said potentially harmful chemicals enter the market at the rate of 1,000 a year and urged that legislation be enacted to give the government power to monitor and test all chemicals proposed for industrial or consumer use.

EPA officials claim PCBs have been found in milk, eggs and poultry from livestock exposed to grain contaminated with the chemicals.

Train added that little can be done about the estimated 700 million tons of PCBs which have been discharged into the environment over the years.

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