

3 Thumb families settle PCB suits

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BAD AXE - Three Thumb farm families have agreed to settle lawsuits filed over contamination from polychlorinated biphenyl used to coat their silos, lawyers and family members said today.

The settlements, reached Thursday in Huron County Circuit Court, signal an end to PCB suits that had been watched with interest by farm families and agriculture experts across the Midwest. Terms of the settlements with C & B Silo Co. were not disclosed.

"We are glad that it's done," said Deborah Hyzer who, with her family, sued C & B Silo and Monsanto Chemical Co. over ailments they claimed stemmed from PCB used as a sealant on the walls of their silo. "We're both just very happy that it's over and we hope that the toxins left in us don't prevent us or our kids from having a happy future."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned the use of PCB in 1977 after the chemicals were linked to cancer and other health problems in laboratory animals. PCB had been used to coat hundreds of silos in the Midwest from the 1940s to 1960s.

The Hyzers' suit against C & B was to go to trial after the

conclusion of a consolidated case brought by Ronald and Bonita Schulz, and Dale and Christine Schulz. Testimony in the Schulz' cases was finished and lawyers were preparing jury instructions when a settlement was reached in all three cases, a court official said.

C & B, formerly of Charlotte, declared bankruptcy in the late 1970s and is no longer in business. The firm's lawyer, John Davidson, of Saginaw, declined to comment on the manner in which the firm will pay the families.

Jurors in a 1984 trial involving an Owendale farm family ruled that C & B was not liable for damages in that case.

Monsanto had settled with all three families more than a year ago. Terms of that settlement also were not disclosed, however.

"There's great relief that it's over," said Dale Schulz of the settlement with C & B. Schulz had two silos contaminated by PCB. "We're glad it's behind us now. But we just have to live with the PCB remaining in our systems. It's fat soluble and it goes out of our system real slow."

"The amount of PCB in our blood has dropped down about a third since it was detected in 1978 but as it drops, it always drops slower," he added.