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EPA disputes claims PCB 1016 less harmful

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Although Westinghouse Electric Corporation has supported the claim by Monsanto, the only company that makes polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in this country, that the PCB used by Westinghouse is less hazardous to the environment than other PCBs, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has disputed that claim.

"There is no significant evidence to indicate Aroclor 1016 is any different than any other PCB," said Dr. I.E. Wallen, Deputy Director of the EPA's Office of Toxic Substances. "The only thing we know is that it is being advocated by the companies that it is safer."

Monsanto's and Westinghouse's stand has been that Aroclor 1016, a PCB used in the manufacture of electrical power capacitors locally, is more biodegradable and less environmentally damaging than other PCBs.

Wallen said in a telephone interview Wednesday that the safety claim is being made by "all of the manufacturers who are using 1016."

Wallen said Aroclor 1016, the trade name for PCB marketed by Monsanto, would be distinguishable from more highly chlorinated PCBs, but that "it would be easy to mistake one for the other."

He said all the capacitor manufacturers were basing their claims on Monsanto research.

"When we take it all in context, the differences haven't been shown," said Wallen.

He explained that a numbering system used by Monsanto for all other PCBs indicates chlorine content of the PCB in the last two digits with the exception of 1016. Aroclor 1254, for example, would be 54 per cent chlorine, while Aroclor 1242 would contain a 42 per cent chlorine concentration in the PCB.

Aroclor 1016 contains a chlorine concentration of 41.3 per cent. Research chemists at the EPA refer to it as Aroclor 1241.3.

"We contend the shifting of the numbers doesn't make any difference," said Wallen. "All of them (PCB mixtures containing varying levels of chlorine) have to be treated as equal, even though there may be minor differences between them."

Westinghouse has echoed the Monsanto claim that Aroclor 1016 includes fewer of the more highly chlorinated PCBs while at the same time admitting the compound is 41.3 per cent chlorine.

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