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Sales Limit on Substance Linked to Birth Defects

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WASHINGTON, July 14 — The only American manufacturer of an industrial chemical called PCB has decided to restrict sales of the chemical because of mounting evidence that it can induce birth defects in animals.

The Monsanto Company of St. Louis said in a letter to Representative William F. Ryan of Manhattan that it would no longer sell PCB for use as a water-resistant plasticizer or as a hydraulic fluid.

In April, the company asked the Department of Agriculture to prohibit use of the chemical in pesticides.

Monsanto said it would continue to manufacture the chemical for use as a coolant in electrical transformers because of its "unique properties" and because its emission into the environment could be controlled in a "closed system" such as a transformer.

PCB, short for polychlorinated biphenyls, is chemically similar to DDT in that it resists biological breakdown. Monsanto has been selling it for 40 years under the trade name Aroclor.

There has been an increasing number of scientific reports in recent years that PCB was being found in fish, birds, fruits and even in minuscule quantities, in human milk. There is evidence that large doses affected the enzymes and, thus, sex hormones in certain animals.

The primary use of PCB has always been as a lubricant in transformers, the purpose for which Monsanto will continue to make it. The chemical also appears in a number of paints and adhesives that require a high degree of corrosive resistance.

Several years ago Monsanto began a campaign to market it commercially for use in such household products as floor waxes, other paints and caulking compounds.

The company refuses to make public a list of all products now containing PCB. A company spokesman said that publication of such a list would "serve no useful nonpolitical purpose."

The company spokesman said that Monsanto did not know until recently that the chemical, a liquid that it sells in giant drums, was being used as a pesticide.

According to a Department of Agriculture official, PCB is used in at least eight different brands of insecticides now on the market.

but had taken no action to prohibit its use.

Representative Ryan, who has conducted a year-long campaign to limit, if not prohibit, the use of PCB, said he was not completely satisfied with Monsanto's action and hoped that sales would be restricted even further.

Mr. Ryan said he would continue to press the Agriculture Department to reject any insecticide using the material and urged that any product containing PCB be so labelled.