

MAR 30 1981

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004023

Monsanto

FROM
(NAME-LOCATION-PHONE) D. R. Bishop - A3NB

DATE : March 27, 1981

cc.

SUBJECT :

REFERENCE :

TO : Distribution List

Enclosed is the official corporate response to allegations contained in the lawsuit filed by Nitro Plant employees earlier this week.

This position has been reviewed and approved for use by Messrs. Duesenberg, Gossage, Hussey, Roush, Throdahl and others as appropriate.

It will be used both internally and externally in the Nitro/Charleston area at the discretion of Nitro Plant management.

Its use in all other areas to respond to press inquiries will be at the discretion of and controlled by me. We intend to give this limited corporate-wide circulation to senior, key and some select managers on an F.Y.I. basis.

OpUnit distribution to these managers will be at the discretion of individual Directors of Public Relations.


Dan R. Bishop

DRB:ec

Enclosure

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ON REQUEST

D. R. Bishop
(314) 694-2891

PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
Monsanto Company
800 N. Lindbergh Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri 63166

ST. LOUIS, March 27 -- Monsanto Company issued the following statement today in response to allegations contained in a lawsuit filed on March 25, 1981 against the company by 54 individuals, including former employees at Monsanto's Nitro (W. VA) Plant, their spouses and representatives of eight deceased former employees:

The suit charges that Monsanto was aware of health hazards associated with specific chemicals, but concealed that information from employees. In support of this allegation, reference was made to a company memo dated November 16, 1977, which, according to the complaint, "instructs managers in ways to avoid requests for industrial health data." The complaint quotes -- out of context -- from two paragraphs of a two-page guideline document entitled: "How to Handle Employee and Local Union Requests for Employee Health Data." (A copy of the full document is attached).

When read in context, these guidelines present an entirely different picture of the company's approach to sharing health and safety information with employees even by today's standards -- which are quite different than they were just four years ago.

In a company of this size with 62,000 employees worldwide and 150 manufacturing locations, it is both appropriate and necessary to establish and promulgate guidelines, policies and procedures.

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Hazard is a relative expression of potential danger. Virtually anything at some level of exposure may become hazardous. At other levels of exposure it can be relatively hazard-free. Experiences from the real world are replete with examples bearing this out. Penicillin and streptomycin, for example, are both extremely beneficial drugs that have saved millions of lives around the world. However, when fed to laboratory animals at certain relatively high doses, both have been shown to cause cancerous tumors -- an obvious hazard to test animals.

Monsanto has a long standing policy of being open and candid with its employees -- willingly sharing with them and their union representatives -- pertinent health, safety and environmental information.

At the same time, it would be impractical, imprudent and against their individual or collective best interests to pass on to them every new bit of newly generated toxicological data from whatever source until and if it can be quantified, qualified and placed in the proper medical or scientific perspective.

Roman numeral IV (from the attached) was designed to guide local managers in handling requests for this kind of "out of perspective" information. It was also designed to ensure that employee privacy rights with respect to their own medical records were protected.

To attempt to lift this out of context and use it as proof that the company deliberately concealed information on health hazards associated with chemicals flies in the face of reality and falsely characterizes what has long been a responsible employee relations program.

As far as we know, the only chemical that any Nitro plant employee was ever exposed to in an amount that could be considered hazardous was para amino biphenyl (PAB). This intermediate chemical was used from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s in the production of chemical raw materials at the Nitro Plant. (Note: A chemical intermediate is one that occurs during a chemical reaction and is consumed in the process).

In 1955, Monsanto confirmed that prolonged exposure to PAB could cause a delayed incidence of tumors of the bladder in humans. On its own initiative, Monsanto immediately halted the use of PAB and placed all employees exposed to the substance -- even those remotely exposed -- in a long-term health monitoring program which continues even today at company expense.

This incident has been widely treated in both the medical literature and the popular press and Monsanto's response to this unfortunate health problem has been referred to several times in the medical literature as a model for safety activities and for the guidance of other companies and occupational medicine physicians.

The suit also alleges that these employees were exposed to hazardous levels of the phenoxy herbicide, 2,4,5-T, and "dioxin" and that this information was concealed from them.

2,4,5-T was manufactured at Nitro from 1948 until 1969 when its production was discontinued for a variety of economic reasons.

This herbicide has been safely manufactured and marketed for nearly 40 years in this country and abroad by many firms for crop production and forest management applications.

In March of 1949, a well known and widely documented accident occurred in the 2,4,5-T unit, exposing those present and those later involved in the cleanup, on an acute or short term basis, to potentially hazardous amounts of the chemicals present. Some 121 employees developed symptoms including a skin rash known as chloracne, eye and respiratory tract irritation, headache, dizziness, nausea and liver disorder. These employees all received medical treatment at company expense and some were even referred to outside physicians who were specialists in specific disorders. All symptoms -- except some cases of residual chloracne -- subsequently disappeared.

We have continued to monitor the health status of these employees and have observed no adverse long-term health effects in this group of workers other than the aforementioned residual chloracne.

Monsanto does not believe that its Nitro employees, other than those involved in the 1949 accident, were ever exposed to potentially hazardous amounts of this chemical or its byproducts and even those present in 1949, to the best of our knowledge, did not suffer serious or irreversible long term health effects.

Two detailed mortality studies (studies of the cause of death) support this position. One study centered on those employees who were involved in the 1949 accident and have since died from any and all causes. The other looked at the cause of death of all others involved in 2,4,5-T production at Nitro for one or more years between 1955 and 1977. The results of both studies, completed and made public in 1980, failed to show any apparent relationship between workplace exposure and death.

Two additional and very comprehensive epidemiology studies of the Nitro work force are currently being conducted by independent medical investigators. These studies involve present and former employees -- still alive -- and are focusing on current health status. We are confident that these studies, when completed, will further bear out our belief that Nitro employees have not suffered ill effects from their occupational exposure to chemicals.

Monsanto is terribly disappointed that this group of people have seen fit to bring this action. The company will, however, vigorously protect its interests and its reputation as this litigation proceeds.