Draft: 10/9/79 File - "Nova"

STATEMENT FROM MONSANTO COMPANY

The Public Broadcasting System's "NOVA" television program, "A Plague on Our Children," presented an inaccurate and slanted look at some serious problems of the chemical industry. Unfortunately, the program left the impression that the industry as a whole and Monsanto in particular are unconcerned and irresponsible -- an implication that is untrue and irresponsible in itself.

The bias of the program's producer, Robert Richter, was cited by The New York Times television reviewer, who wrote: "There is no doubt that Mr. Richter sympathizes with the critics, typified by Barry Commoner, the author and activist."

Furthermore, a number of statements in the program made by Dr. Commoner about Monsanto were either incorrect or reflected only a portion of the truth.

Monsanto acknowledges that there are problems associated with chemicals -- either through their misuse or through earlier industry practices recognized today to be inadequate. Monsanto agrees these problems exist, and we have repeatedly spoken out for a cooperative effort by industry, government, academia and other groups to address the problems in a cooperative fashion. Those who simply shout from the sidelines add nothing to solving the problems that exist, and indeed are counterproductive.

Monsanto has consistently endorsed reasonable regulation of chemicals; further, there is ample evidence* our company has a commitment to health and environmental protection. We denounce implications to the contrary.

To set the record straight on specific details of the NOVA program: Monsanto has been and is very concerned about the environmental problems posed by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). We believe that the history of Monsanto's involvement with PCBs demonstrates concern and an effort to deal with the problems responsibly.

Production of PCBs was begun in 1929 -- not to "invade markets of previous substances," as Dr. Commoner said, but to provide improved insulating fluids and increased fire resistance in electrical transformers. Mineral oil, the only known alternative, had stability problems and flammability that made it a potential hazard.

---

*(Monsanto has some 840 managers, scientists and technicians working exclusively on worker, product and environmental safety. In 1978 we spent nearly $200 million on this work. We have established a top-level Environmental Policy Staff to manage the impact of our business on the environment and the worker. We have completed a $12 million toxicology laboratory for long and short-range health effect studies.

We've mounted a $500,000 program to help finance the academic training of toxicologists and to reduce the present acute shortage. We were instrumental in founding the Chemical Industry Institute of Toxicology, which does long-range testing of materials used throughout our industry, as well as basic research into areas like carcinogenesis. And we are now pioneering the development of a major new computerized system to monitor worker health and environmental exposure.)

Dr. Commoner said that Monsanto knew by 1933 "from the effects on their own workers that they were dealing with a very dangerous substance."

The facts show that, in 1933 when the skin disease, chloracne, began appearing among workers in the PCB plant at Anniston, Alabama, the company immediately launched a medical investigation. As a result, steps were taken to change to a closed manufacturing process in which all chemical reactions occur in a sealed system, which in turn alleviated the problems. The appearance of chloracne -- which is a painful skin disease -- did not lead Monsanto at that time to suspect that PCBs were "a very dangerous substance."

In the late 1960s, the first signs of potential environmental problems turned up in two separate events -- one in Sweden, the other in Japan. The latter was referred to in the NOVA program, though the report was in error. In 1968, about 1,300 Japanese became ill from eating a rice oil heavily contaminated with Japanese-produced PCBs. There were no stillbirths or miscarriages linked with the incident, as reported in the NOVA program. The Swedish findings -- based on new analytical techniques -- suggested that small traces of PCBs were present in fish.

When scientific investigations first confirmed the presence of PCBs in the U.S. environment in 1970 -- and long before any potential impact was determined -- Monsanto voluntarily began a program to terminate sales of PCBs to open applications and

to limit supply of PCBs to the electrical power distribution industry, as dielectric fluids in "closed" or sealed systems such as transformers and capacitors. Preventive steps were also taken in the manufacturing, labeling and transport of PCBs.

In 1972, Monsanto's voluntary program was reviewed by a Federal Interdepartment Task Force, which supported and endorsed it.

Near the end of 1975, the then EPA Administrator Russell Train said he would not ask Monsanto to stop production of PCBs because that would shut down the electrical power industry and the railroads in short order.

The NOVA host announcer said the "sale and manufacturing of PCB was banned as of 1979," and Dr. Commoner said, "The action was taken far too late." What neither bothered to mention was that Monsanto had voluntarily withdrawn from the business in 1977.

Monsanto's plan to totally end production was announced by the company in October, 1976. At that time the company pointed out that fire insurance, building and electrical codes and regulations in many parts of the country have traditionally required the use of PCBs in high density population uses where violent failure involving a flammable fluid could result in a catastrophic fire or explosion. The company also explained that the phaseout period was constrained by the necessary testing and perfecting by the electrical industry of replacement products, which had not existed earlier.

Production of PCBs by Monsanto was halted in July, 1977.

Dr. Commoner also said that "most of the PCB that's been produced is in the environment, contaminating every living thing." While we are concerned about the levels of PCB in the environment, his statement was incorrect and inflammatory. In the early 1970s, Monsanto built and operated an incinerator for the specific purpose of safely destroying PCB waste liquids, both from its own operations and from its customers.

The disposal of PCBs today is under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Although PCBs are no longer imported into the United States, they are still produced by firms in Germany, France, Spain, Italy and certain eastern European countries.

In speaking about the Toxic Substances Control Act, Dr. Commoner said, "As far as I can tell, the industry is going to squeeze every loophole out of that situation that they can." Monsanto in <u>fact</u> supported and urged Congressional approval of the Act in 1976.

At that time, Mr. Hanley said, "As part of Monsanto's responsibilities to society, we recognize and support the need to adhere to tough and reasonable standards to control toxic substances. We hope that this legislation will be signed into law by President Ford and implemented in a reasonable and effective manner through government and industry cooperation."

The NOVA program also described an incident in North Carolina, in which PCB contaminated oil was dumped along rural roads. The program did not report that those who were responsible, from a small waste disposal firm, were convicted and given jail sentences.

The NOVA program also visited Monsanto's Nitro, West Virginia, site, where a health study is being carried out on workers who were exposed to the toxic impurity, dioxin, during production of the chemicals 2,4,5-trichlorophenol (2,4,5-T). ~~The exposure came in a process explosion in 1949.~~

The study discussed in the program is sponsored by the union, the United Steel Workers, in cooperation with New York's Mount Sinai Medical Center. The program did not mention that Monsanto has also funded a health study there, under the complete control of Dr. Raymond Susskind, director of the Institute of Environmental Health at the University of Cincinnati and a recognized authority on the effects of dioxin exposure. That study began over two years ago, in mid-1977, and is being done in part in hopes to confirm that there are no serious long-term health problems and to assist the World Health Organization in its attempt to find answers to the medical questions surrounding exposure to dioxin.

In a slighting reference to the Mount Sinai Medical Center study, the program's host said, "in this case, Monsanto is cooperating...." In fact, the directors of the study from Mount

Sinai earlier this year wrote to the Nitro plant manager: "We wish to thank you and the members of your staff for the welcome extended to members of the Mount Sinai research team during the plant tour on April 5th. We appreciate the thoroughness and excellent organization of the tour and most especially the time given to us."

Monsanto particularly resents a statement by Anthony Mazzocchi, a union representative: "Industry's claim that they don't wish to hurt people is just a pious platitude." He said, "I suggest that the sophisticated (corporate) apparatus is there to disguise, and to obfuscate and to conceal." And he said, "Science in service of people would be protection; but science in service of corporations can never protect, it can only conceal."

These statements are untrue, irresponsible and intentionally inflammatory. Monsanto has an unqualified commitment to the health and safety of its employees. The company's Social Responsibility Policy Statements include: "We will Provide a Safe and Healthful Workplace for Our Employees. To support our Employee Health and Safety Policy Statement, we will regularly monitor employee health, the work environment and developments in occupational medicine to detect and correct conditions which are hazardous to human health...."

The chemical industry has long emphasized worker safety. In 1977, the industry's frequency rate for recordable injuries

and illnesses was 60% of that for all U.S. industry. And Monsanto's record is less than half the average of the chemical industry.

Other portions of the NOVA program have been criticized as inaccurate or misleading, and certainly as not presenting the best scientific knowledge available on troublesome issues. One such criticism, by the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, is attached.

-o0o-

NOTE: For further information on any of these issues, please contact: Dan Bishop or Gerry Ingenthron

Public Relations Department
Monsanto Company
800 North Lindbergh Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63166

(314) 694-1000