

PAGE: 21 end of document

run people - get on with it

Ryan Seeks to Stop Monsanto Sale of 'Deadly' Chemical Family

Rep. William F. Ryan (Dem.), New York, is seeking a law to stop Monsanto Co. from selling a family of chemicals called polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which he says are "deadly" and "have been discovered in a wide variety of foods and animals."

In a House speech, Ryan charged that federal agencies have done little in the last year "to combat this very serious environmental health hazard."

Monsanto, the only American manufacturer, "has taken some steps under public pressure, but more need to be done," Ryan said.

A MONSANTO spokesman told The Globe-Democrat Friday that the company, in addition to various steps taken to control use of PCBs, has stopped sales of the product for use in "open" systems and is buying back used PCB for recycling or incineration.

The chemicals are in a Monsanto product called Aroclor, used in a variety of other prod-

ucts ranging from paints and paper coatings to electrical transformer fluids.

Surface coatings, adhesives and the like are "open" systems; transformers are "closed" systems.

"We've told customers not to throw the fluid away when they drain their transformers, but to send it back to us," the spokesman said.

"WE'VE BEEN DOING that for a full year now."

The spokesman said a new incinerator at the company's Sauget, Ill., plant, where the PCBs are manufactured, should be ready for use in three or four weeks.

Ryan said the steps taken by Monsanto, while helpful, are not adequate.

"Present control of PCBs is dependent on the efforts and good faith of the Monsanto Co. and the full cooperation of each and every one of its customers," he said.

"That is not enough to insure protection of our citizens from the menace of this deadly chemical."

RYAN SAID PCBs and their residues are "extremely toxic to animal life" and pose a "most frightening hazard" to human beings.

They do not dissolve in water and are capable of being widely

distributed over the earth through air currents, he noted. Also, he said, they resist biological breakdown.

The congressman accused the St. Louis corporation of "a callous indifference to the public welfare" in refusing "repeatedly" to give him production and sales figures on the PCBs. The figures are needed, Ryan said, so scientists can determine "what quantities of PCBs have been and are escaping into the environment."

"However, Monsanto has informed me that it would make such information available to 'responsible government agencies' on a confidential basis," Ryan said.

Curbs on PCBs vary

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government protects chickens and catfish from food containing more than a half part per million of DDT-like chemicals called PCBs. But people can eat chicken or catfish containing 10 times as much before the government does anything.

But then baby cereal and spaghetti dinners may not contain any more PCBs than chicken feed.

Why?

"We had to have some sort of action level," John T. Walden, press officer for the Food and Drug Administration, said Monday.

Walden's explanation of the differing guidelines came after persistent, poisonous PCBs started the government anew on a trail that already led through chicken feed, chickens, turkeys and eggs.

Now the FDA has found the chemical in some shredded wheat, spaghetti dinners, corn meal, mixed baby cereal, grits, noisette dinners and pancake mix. In one sample of shredded wheat the PCB concentration was 43 times the safety level set by federal guidelines. In other foods the concentration ranged from less than the federal guideline to four times the level.

The agency has seized none of the products. In the case of the shredded wheat, Walden explained that the high concentration was in only one sample and the FDA didn't find enough contaminated samples to justify seizure.

The FDA said the contamination originated in containers made from recycled cardboard. The recyclers apparently used a PCB-treated carbonless duplicating paper, Walden said.

The FDA is sampling 15 products packaged in such cardboard.

Walden said it's the speed with which the PCB problem has cropped up that has fostered the differing guidelines for foods. The poultry guidelines were set up first. As the pollutant became more prevalent, the lower guideline was set up for other foods.

"The truth is our scientists—and no scientists—know about PCBs or what to do about it," said Walden. "This all leads us to why we called together these five agencies of government to look at the problem."

His reference was to a recently established joint federal task force on PCBs.

"We don't know where it comes from. . . . We don't know once it gets into the body what its problem might be."

"With mercury we had good, solid clinical evidence. With PCBs it's just we've got more questions than we've got answers."

PCBs have triggered an outbreak of liver and skin ailments in Japan and have killed chick embryos in laboratory experiments.

One proposal from Rep. William F. Ryan, the New York Democrat who has been critical of FDA's handling of PCBs, is to ban the chemical—at least until scientists know more about it.