

Monsanto

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PCB PRODUCTION HISTORY FACT SHEET

Polychlorinated biphenyls or PCBs are compounds consisting of carbon, hydrogen and chlorine atoms. They are chemically inert, stable and fire resistant. These properties made them invaluable for their principal use -- as cooling and insulating fluids in heavy-duty electrical equipment, including capacitors and transformers.

For more than 40 years, the use of PCB electrical fluids was required in most high-rise buildings, schools, hospitals and industrial operations where the risks of fires or explosions were major concerns.

Over time, PCBs came to be used in other products for which they had beneficial effects. These included hydraulic and heat-transfer fluids, lubricants, surface coatings, carbonless copy paper, printing inks, plasticizers and special adhesives. Below is a brief history of PCB production and sales.

1929 - Swann Chemical Company, Anniston, Ala., began producing PCBs.

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- 1935 - Monsanto Chemical Company, St. Louis, Mo., purchased Swann and continued PCB production.
- 1970 - The presence of PCBs in the U.S. environment was confirmed.
- 1970-72 - Monsanto phased out sales of PCBs for "open applications" that could lead to environmental releases. These uses, which reduced the company's PCB sales by 64 percent, included heat-transfer fluids, hydraulic fluids, plasticizer applications, and miscellaneous uses.
- 1972 - Monsanto limited PCB sales to selected customers solely for use in "totally enclosed" electrical equipment. A federal task force recommended that Monsanto continue production for these uses until effective substitutes were developed so as not to disrupt electrical power transmission in the U.S.
- 1976 - The Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) was enacted; it includes provisions for the total regulation of PCBs.
- 1977 - Monsanto voluntarily halted PCB production for its sole remaining use as a dielectric (cooling, insulating) fluid for electrical equipment.
- 1979 - EPA issued rules under TSCA banning future manufacture of PCBs.

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PCB substitutes now used in electrical equipment include mineral oil, silicone compounds and phthalate esters. None of these offers the same fire resistant qualities of PCBs.

PCB use and manufacture continues in other countries including Germany, France, Spain, Italy and some Eastern European nations where PCBs are considered necessary for fire safety in industrial operations.

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