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Monsanto Sets Withdrawal From PCB Market in 1977

ST. LOUIS—Monsanto Co. said it will withdraw completely from the polychlorinated biphenyl, or PCB, market "no later than Oct. 31, 1977."

Under the toxic substances bill passed by Congress last week, all PCB production must cease within two years, and sales within six years.

PCBs or dielectric insulating fluids are used in transformers and capacitors for

electrical power generation. Monsanto said PCBs are preferred because PCB-filled capacitors fail infrequently and, therefore, in some parts of the country fire, insurance, building and electrical codes and regulations require PCB use in high-density population applications.

In recent years, however, concern has been growing over the potentially dangerous toxic effects to the environment of PCBs, which are synthetic chlorinated organic compounds that resist biodegradation.

In 1976 Monsanto, the principal supplier, began restricting use of its PCBs to closed electrical systems for which an alternative

didn't exist. In January the company said it would cease production of PCBs as soon as the electrical industry could find alternate fluids and convert equipment to their use.

Monsanto said it appears that "the industry has moved in on replacement candidates" and is field-testing non-PCB electrical components. The company also said the prospective replacements "appear to provide acceptable dielectric performance, but system redesign has been required to circumvent the fire hazard potential which was introduced."

Because PCBs have been the standard for certain dielectric applications for the

past six years, Monsanto said, there isn't any standard to guide users in evaluating less fire-resistant fluids.

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MONSANTO TO DROP PCBs

Earle H. Harbison, Jr., general manager of Monsanto's specialty chemical division, announced in late October that the company will shut down its polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) unit, complete distribution of all inventories, and withdraw from the market completely by Oct. 31, 1977.

PCB's have been a source of concern since the early 1970's when they were found to persist and accumulate in the environment. Even at low ppm levels, are found to cause adverse effects in aquatic life and lab tests have shown them to cause reproductive failures, gastric disorders, skin lesions, and tumors in mammals. Russell Train, EPA administrator, while commending Monsanto's decision noted, however, that the PCB problem will continue. He pointed out that millions of pounds of PCB's are already in the environment. Alternatives to PCB's at present are oil and silicone fluids.

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