

UPI Wire & Journal of Commerce Wire Stories on Monsanto Fraud

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(Editors: Repeating earlier story)

EPA probing alleged manipulation of dioxin health studies
By GEORGE LOBSENZ

WASHINGTON (UPI) - The Environmental Protection Agency is investigating charges that a chemical company improperly manipulated scientific studies to minimize the possible health threat posed by dioxin, officials confirmed.

Disclosure of the EPA probe came as Greenpeace, the international environmental group, released a report Thursday detailing alleged irregularities in studies sponsored by Monsanto Co., a maker of pesticides and other chemical products.

Greenpeace also filed a petition with the EPA urging the agency to tighten its controls on dioxin. The petition maintained the EPA heavily relied on the Monsanto studies in setting its regulatory policies, but agency officials said that was not the case.

The petition cited "credible concerns that the agency's existing (dioxin) human effects data base is polluted by incorrect information, that the human health effects of (dioxin) may be far worse than originally believed, and that the polluted data has led the agency to 'go soft' on (dioxin)."

In its report, Greenpeace said the EPA's Office of Criminal Enforcement had begun preliminary inquiries into possible manipulation of three key dioxin studies sponsored by Monsanto.

Asked about the Greenpeace report, an EPA official who asked not to be identified said: "There is an investigation under way." The official declined to elaborate on the specifics of the investigation. Glynn Young, a spokesman for Monsanto, said the company had not been notified of any EPA investigation and that it stood by the studies as sound and unbiased. At the same time, he said Monsanto had asked the EPA to review the studies again in light of the allegations.

Young said the allegations against the studies arose from litigation against Monsanto in which Greenpeace was an active participant. He characterized the Greenpeace report as a "rehash" of issues raised in court.

The Monsanto studies have been cited by some scientists in challenging federal policies that generally categorize dioxin as a highly toxic agent to humans. Those critics say while laboratory animal studies suggest high toxicity, harmful effects have not been verified in exposed humans.

Dioxin is a by-product in the manufacture of certain pesticides and herbicides, most notably Agent Orange, the defoliant widely used during the Vietnam War. It also is generated in incineration and the bleaching of wood pulp for white paper products.

The three Monsanto studies at issue examined health effects among workers at the company's herbicide plant in Nitro, W.Va., who were exposed to dioxin during routine operations from 1955 to 1977 as well as in a 1949 industrial accident that released larger

amounts of the contaminant.

The studies, published from 1980 to 1983, are important because they represent one of the most comprehensive assessments of dioxin's health impact on humans.

The Monsanto studies found no conclusive evidence of serious health effects - such as cancer or liver damage - due to dioxin exposure. As with other studies, the Monsanto reports suggest the only consistent ailment among exposed workers was chloracne, a severe form of skin lesions.

Among other allegations, the Greenpeace report suggested the Monsanto studies were manipulated in that:

- Disease rates among dioxin-exposed workers were compared with illness in a "control" group of workers who supposedly were not exposed, but actually were. As a result, the report said, differences in disease rates between the two groups were muted.

- Dioxin-exposed workers were arbitrarily placed into different groups that were studied separately. The groups were so small in number that it became virtually impossible to detect statistically significant increases in disease among exposed workers compared to the unexposed.

- Some cases of cancer and heart disease among dioxin-exposed workers inexplicably were excluded from some studies.

Greenpeace said its report, entitled "Science for Sale," was based on independent analysis of the Monsanto studies, internal Monsanto memos and the sworn testimony of Monsanto employees and consultants. EPA officials said that, as with other chemicals, the agency largely developed its dioxin policies on the basis of laboratory animal studies in which relatively low doses of dioxin caused cancer, birth defects and liver, kidney and nerve damage.

Those health effects have not been observed in studies of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange nor in forestry workers with long-term occupational exposure to dioxin-contaminated herbicides.

The EPA has acknowledged the uncertainty about dioxin's impact on human health, but the agency has decided to err on the side of caution and has pushed the paper industry and others to reduce dioxin contamination.

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Charles Laszewski, "EPA to probe alleged problems with Monsanto dioxin studies; Greenpeace says reports falsified," in "The Journal of Commerce," Pacific Edition, November 30, 1990, pp. 7A.

EPA to probe alleged problems with Monsanto dioxin studies;
Greenpeace says reports falsified

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confirmed Wednesday it was investigating whether Monsanto Corp. manipulated and falsified studies of workers exposed to dioxin to make the chemical appear less harmful to humans.

The environmental group Greenpeace, in a report, claimed that three studies done by the company in the early 1980s, and relied upon by the EPA, falsely concluded there was no apparent link between dioxin and the deaths of employees at the company's Nitro, W.V., herbicide plant.

Dan Bishop, director of Monsanto corporate communications in St. Louis, said he was unaware of that investigation, but his company asked the EPA in October to do an audit of the studies.

"I'm delighted to hear it and welcome it," he said of the EPA investigation. "I think that is the only way we can put it to rest. I wish they had started yesterday. We deeply resent these accusations. We stand on the record with those three studies."

But Greenpeace's Joe Thornton, who wrote the report on dioxin, was just as adamant about the Monsanto studies and another one done by the giant German chemical company BASF. Both studied employees who either worked routinely with dioxin-contaminated products or were exposed to it through accidents.

"These are politically motivated and untrue," Mr. Thornton said of the dioxin studies.

Gwen Brown, an EPA spokeswoman, said the agency had not seen the Greenpeace report and would not be able to comment. She confirmed there was an investigation under way by the agency's office of criminal investigation into Monsanto's handling of the studies.

The problem is that industries have used the studies to claim that no deaths have occurred because of dioxin exposure, Mr. Thornton said. Also, the studies have been used to convince EPA not to aggressively ban dioxin from the environment, he said.

The EPA has from time to time said it was going to downgrade the health risk of dioxin, although it has never followed through because of objections from its science advisory board. The result has been constant uncertainty on just how dangerous dioxin, which is now present in most humans, might be to health.