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Monsanto Refuses To Disclose Who is Purchaing Its PCBs

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The Monsanto Co., which manufactures polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) has refused to disclose who buys the industrial chemicals, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Waste Control Commission said Monday.

However, Lonnie Dye, the commission's chief engineer, told the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) that eventually the source of the PCBs in the Mississippi River will be traced.

Monsanto is the only United States firm which manufactures PCBs, which have been found in fish taken from the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers and Lake Superior.

PCBs are believed to cause birth defects and reproductive failures in fish, birds and mammals.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the PCA said PCBs have been found in groundwater near Winona in southeastern Minnesota, but concentrations are not believed dangerous.

It had been discovered earlier that PCBs were present in a Winona junkyard, where machinery oils had been dumped. However, the PCA said tests showed most of the chemical from the spilled oil apparently remained in the ground and didn't drain into the ground water.

Sens. Walter F. Mondale and Hubert H. Humphrey, D-Minn., expressed displeasure when they learned of Monsanto's refusal to divulge information about purchasers of the chemicals.

Mondale said PCBs should be prohibited, and added that at least "we ought to know" who's using the chemical.

Humphrey said the chemical should be disposed of more safely.

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Civic leaders stand by GE

The General Electric Co. is the victim and the Environmental Conservation Department is the villain—according to Washington County civic leaders who have been watching the PCB drama unfold.

EnCon says GE has to stop polluting the Hudson River with the chemical PCB. And the company says that zero PCB is impossible, so it may be forced to close down its two Washington County plants, which employ about 1,300.

EnCon Commissioner Ogden Reid says the toxic waste has made fish in the river dangerous to eat.

Leon Layden, supervisor of Hudson Falls, where one of the plants is located, complains, "Reid is more concerned with striped bass than he is with people."

"You've got to weigh the whole situation here," he continued. "I'm not in favor of polluting the river...if eating the fish from the river is a problem then why don't they just post no-fishing signs?

"I tried to reach the plant manager to tell him on behalf of the town that we want to help GE in any way we can," Layden said.

"GE is an excellent neighbor," said Rosewell Earl, mayor of the Village of Hudson Falls. "When we had a warehouse fire in this area a year ago they were more than happy to turn on their high-pressure pumps. If they were to move the plant or close it it would be an economic disaster to Hudson Falls and the surrounding communities. I think EnCon has yet to prove a point."

Andrew Collins, a member of the Hudson Falls Chamber of Commerce, agreed that closing of the plant would have a major effect and added, "I think this might be a case of (EnCon) crying 'Wolf, wolf!' much later than they should."

"I can't say the five pounds (of PCB) that they say they are dumping a day is a great threat compared to what they were dumping previously," he said. "They (EnCon) are flexing their muscles now when, if necessary at all, it should have been a long time ago. It's silly."

Louis Fisher, town supervisor of Fort Edward, where the other GE plant is located, said, "I have a feeling they will work out a solution, possibly by being given more time to comply."

"There's no question that some of the points raised by EnCon, if true, are valid," Fisher said.

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