March 13, 1969

Mrs. Charlene T. Arbogast
561 Vernon Street
Oakland, Calif. 94710

Dear Mrs. Arbogast:

Please pardon the delay in answering your letter of February 24, but I wanted to give you a full reply regarding the charge that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) are harming wildlife and threatening mankind. I presume your letter was prompted by the San Francisco Chronicle story about work done by Dr. Risebrough at the University of California.

The press deadline of the writer, David Perlman, did not give us time to put Monsanto's reply into this article. Therefore, here are the facts which should have been presented.

First, Mrs. Arbogast, let me assure you that Monsanto does care about proper use of our products and how they may affect the environment. In fact, we have begun a new venture designed to provide industry and governments with new techniques for eliminating pollution. One system recently demonstrated in the East removes gases from the stacks of coal-fired boilers. Another unit gives cities and companies an improved method for treating materials returned to streams.

Some of the implications in Mr. Perlman's article are not correct. Monsanto does not make DDT. Also, PCB is not a "highly toxic" chemical. The toxicity of any material, whether it be chemicals, drugs or even foods, is relative. Just like other chemicals and home products now in widespread use, PCBs are not hazardous when properly handled and used.

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As you know, Dr. Risebrough's work concerned residues found in various types of wildlife. He identified some material as DDT or DDE pesticides -- and some as PCB. In studying his report, we feel there is doubt as to whether Dr. Risebrough identified the materials correctly. It seems like he went on an earlier identification made by two Swedish scientists using different sources.

The research work in Sweden reported traces of PCB in wildlife approaching that of DDT. Frankly, we are very puzzled by this report. PCBs are not spread around the land, as are pesticides.

A principal market for PCB is in electrical applications where they are used as insulating fluids in sealed metal containers. PCB is also used as a modifier in specialized adhesives and surface coatings. Here the chemical is an integral part of the product and does not wash away, etc.

It is difficult to see how commercially produced PCB could be showing up in the environment in the quantities reported. To our knowledge, PCB is not sprayed on crops, used in automobile tires, found in vinyl plastic or used in house paints -- as has been charged. It is a highly specialized chemical primarily used in closed or sealed systems.

This raises the question where the substances identified are actually PCBs -- or whether they are compounds which only appear so.

Of course, Monsanto is not satisfied to just raise questions. We continue to exercise the highest degree of control in our manufacturing and shipping of PCB -- as we do with all products. We are also conducting a research program to identify the compounds reported to be PCB by the Swedish and California scientists. Some of this work is in cooperation with federal and university laboratories.

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The source of the wildlife residue supposedly identified as PCB is not yet known. It will take extensive research, on a worldwide basis, to confirm or deny these initial scientific reports.

Sincerely,

Tom C. Ford
Manager
Divisional Public Relations

TCF:sfh

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