

NOV 29 1990

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Houston Chronicle Thursday, Nov. 29, 1990

EPA probe of Monsanto is confirmed

Dioxin studies possibly misused

By CHARLES LASZEWSKI
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confirmed Wednesday it is 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 to be released today, 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 Niles, W.V., herbicide plant.

Don Risley, director of Monsanto corporate communications in St. Louis, said he was unaware of the 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 these 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 worked routinely with dioxin-contaminated products or were exposed to it through accidents.

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

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

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.

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Greenpeace, Chemist Challenge Monsanto On Dioxin Findings

By William H. Frohgel
Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

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WASHINGTON — Greenpeace and a whistle-blower at the Environmental Protection Agency are accusing Monsanto Co. of fraudulently understating the health risks of dioxin.

Both the international environmental organization and the EPA chemist called upon the agency to conduct an independent evaluation of what they say are flawed Monsanto studies indicating that dioxin has little health effect on humans.

The EPA chemist, Cale Jenkins, also urged a criminal investigation of the firm, alleging that it covered up evidence of dioxin's ill effects.

A Monsanto spokesman said Wednesday that there appeared to be a criminal inquiry under way and so declined to comment on Jenkins' charges.

But the company said that Greenpeace's allegations were untrue and that the firm stood by the studies. He noted that Monsanto sent a letter to

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the EPA last month asking it to audit the studies to clear the air.

Jenkins, a chemist in the Regulatory Development Branch at EPA, wrote a memo Nov. 15 to the agency's Office of Criminal Investigations accusing the company of a "long pattern of fraud" concerning "dioxin contamination of a wide range of Monsanto Corp. products, as well as health studies of Monsanto's dioxin-exposed workers."

The memo indicates that Jenkins, known at the EPA as a whistle-blower, met Nov. 14 with agents of the National Enforcement Investigations Center, which conducts EPA's criminal inquiries. EPA refused to comment on whether it was conducting a criminal investigation.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace is releasing a report today that it says exposes "fraudulent and manipulated science" in Monsanto's studies of the effect of dioxin on workers at its plant in Nitro, W. Va. An explosion at the plant in 1976 exposed workers to dioxin.

The Greenpeace report is being released in Washington and at dioxin-contaminated sites around the country, including Times Beach, Mo.

The 200-page report, written by former Shell Oil Co. chemist Pat Costner,

says that studies done for Monsanto in 1980 and 1983 made several key scientific mistakes.

In two studies, for example, some people exposed to dioxin were included in the "control" group.

Because regulators relied on the Monsanto studies as proof that dioxin is not too dangerous to humans, EPA should revoke all decisions based on those studies, Greenpeace said.

The group also called upon EPA to set up a national dioxin elimination program, which would phase out use of chlorine in the paper industry and chlorinated compounds in pesticides and would eventually ban some wood preservatives.

Don R. Bishop, director of corporate communications at Monsanto, said that most of the allegations of Jenkins and Greenpeace were not new. He said that Jenkins' memo had been based largely upon claims made in a three-year trial in Belle Plaine, Mo., where residents of Sturgeon, Mo., sought damages for exposure to a small amount of dioxin after a dioxin derailment in 1979.

In her memo, Jenkins wrote, "Monsanto covered up the dioxin contamination of a wide range of its products including Lysol, the disinfectant. Members of the Canadian Parliament recently began an investigation of product contamination," she wrote.

The memo also maintained that according to internal Monsanto documents, samples of herbicides submitted by the company to the Department of Agriculture in the 1970s had been "doctored" and that highly contaminated samples had not been submitted. The herbicides were used in the Agent Orange defoliants during the Vietnam War.

The main criticism in Jenkins' memo and the Greenpeace report is targeted at the 1980 and 1983 studies of Monsanto workers, which were supervised by Dr. Raymond Siskind of the Kettering Institute in Cincinnati.

ST. LOUIS POST DISPATCH
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1990

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