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Monsanto plans PCB phaseout

ST. LOUIS (UPI) — Monsanto Co. announced Monday that it plans to phase out the manufacture of a toxic group of chemicals known as PCBs which environmentalists contend threaten public health and the nation's rivers and lakes.

F. J. Fitzgerald, a corporate vice president, said he could not give an exact timetable for the phaseout but "it would be in a planned and orderly manner."

"As soon as we are satisfied that the electrical power supply industry's needs for usable acceptable alternate dielectric fluids have been met, by whomever, Monsanto will voluntarily shut down its PCB manufacturing unit," Fitzgerald said.

Monsanto is the sole maker of PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, which is used primarily as a nonconductor of direct electrical current. The chemical has been a necessary ingredient in most power-generating equipment.

PCBs have been used in manufacturing processes since 1930, but their presence as toxic substances in the environment was not detected until 1966 because they were confused with DDT, which has a similar chemical structure.

At a conference on PCBs last November in Chicago, Assistant Interior Sec. Nathaniel P. Reed recommended that the federal government impose a nearly total ban on the chemicals.

Reed said he was "deeply shocked by the pervasiveness of PCBs; they are literally everywhere." He said exceedingly high levels of PCBs were found in fish from all parts of the country, indicating the nation's rivers and lakes were "in mortal danger."

PCBs have caused liver cancer and reproductive failures in laboratory animals and some workers using the chemicals have complained of allergic reactions, according to federal officials.

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