March 14, 1969

Mrs. Robert A. Rivera
4285 Whittle Ave.
Oakland, California 94602

Dear Mrs. Rivera:

Mr. Sommer asked that I reply to your letter about the supposed contamination of wildlife by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB).

I presume your note was prompted by the recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle based on work done by Dr. Risebrough at the University of California. Unfortunately, the deadline of the writer, David Perlman, did not give us time to supply Monsanto's answer. Here are the facts which should have been presented.

First, Mrs. Rivera, let me assure you that Monsanto has the deepest concern for proper use of our products and how they affect mankind. In fact, we recently began a new venture to provide cities and industry with new techniques for eliminating pollution. One facility demonstrated in the East removes pollutants from the stacks of coal-fired boilers. Another unit offers cities an improved method for treating materials released to the water.

Some of the implications in the Chronicle story are not true. Monsanto does not make DDT. As you know, Dr. Risebrough's work concerned measurement of residues found in wildlife. After studying his full report, we doubt if he made a complete identification of these materials. It seems he may have depended upon earlier work done in Sweden by scientists using entirely different sources.

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Perhaps I should explain that PCB is not a pesticide. Its primary market is as a functional fluid such as an insulating material in electrical transformers. Here the chemical is used in entirely sealed metal containers. Another PCB market is as a modifier in specialized adhesives and coatings. Here the chemical is an integral part of the material and cannot be washed away, etc.

To our knowledge, PCB is not spread over the land as are pesticides, is not used in automobile tires, is not found in vinyl plastic, is not used in house paints -- as has been charged.

The earlier work done in Sweden reported traces of residue, identified as PCB, in quantities approaching that of DDT and DDE pesticides. Even though all these residues required precise measurement to find them in the parts-per-billion range, we are highly puzzled by one fact. How could that much commercially produced PCB appear in the natural environment? The chemical is a highly specialized product used in restricted ways.

One possible answer is that the substance is not really PCB, but a material which only appears so.

It has also been implied that PCB is a "highly toxic" material. Toxicity is a relative matter whether we are considering chemicals, drugs or even food. Like thousands of industrial and household products, PCB is not a hazardous material if it is properly used. In more than 30 years of industrial use, the chemical has an excellent record.

Of course, Monsanto is not content to just raise questions. We will continue to exercise the highest degree of control in our manufacture and shipment of PCB -- as we do with all products. We also have our own research program to identify the substances reported in California and Sweden. Some of this work is in cooperation with federal and university laboratories.

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The source of the residues 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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