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Monsanto To Halt Production Of Polluting Insulation Fluid

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co., the only U.S. manufacturer of the controversial PCB insulating fluids, announced Monday that it will quit producing the fluids by late next year.

Earle H. Harbison Jr., general manager of Monsanto's specialty chemicals division, said the firm will complete distribution of all inventories and withdraw completely from the market no later than Oct. 31, 1977.

The target date would be even sooner, Harbison said, but electrical transformer and capacitor manufacturers have said they would be unable to convert to other materials any earlier.

PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) is a stable, fire-resistant chemical that is used widely in transformers and capacitors.

"Unfortuantely," Harbison said, "the very properties that have made PCBs ideal and even mandatory for these essential uses, were also found in the early 1970s to be the properties causing them to persist and accumulate in the environment."

PCB has been blamed as a major source of pollution in New York's Hudson River.

The New York Environmental Conservation Department and the General Electric Co. reached agreement recently for GE to contribute some $3 million toward the cost of cleaning PCBs from the Hudson. The agreement came after a lengthy bearing over leakage of PCBs from GE plants at Fort Edwards and Hudson Falls, N.Y., into the Hudson.

The accumulation of PCBs in waterways, Harbison said, triggered the firm's decision to cease production as soon as the electrical industry could find alternate fluids and convert its equipment and components to their use.

The company had earlier quit making PCBs for use in carbonless copy paper, fire resistant hydraulic fluids, heat transfer fluids and plasticisers.

Government tests for a three-year period discovered that the levels of PCB in major water basins were not increasing and, in some cases, were actually decreasing, Harbison said. But he added that the public still saw PCBs as a threat.

Dr. George Rousch, director of the medical and environmental health department of Monsanto, said that extensive studies have failed to produce any evidence that PCBs can cause cancer in animals or humans.

Because they are not readily biodegradeable, however, they do tend to accumulate in animal tissue.

"This in itself," Rousch said, "suggests that they should be replaced if possible with products that are more biodegradeable...."

Harbison said the firm is involved in field testing of nonPCB components but that the new product probably will not offer a comparable degree of fire resistance.

In Washington, Environmental Protection Administrator Russell E. Train praised Monsanto's decision to stop making PCB.

Train, who last December announced an effort to reduce pollution from PCB, said that since then, Monsanto has worked with federal agencies to develop acceptable alternatives.

Train said PCB already in the environment "will be there for years, moving into life systems, including humans.

"The problems still need to be addressed vigorously by government and industry.

"However, the Monsanto decision is a significant step in dealing with the total problem of PCB contamination," Train added.

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