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Ryan Seeks to Stop Monsanto Sale of 'Deadly' Chemical Family

Rep. William F. Ryan (Dem.), New York, is seeking a law to stop Monsanto Co. from selling a family of chemicals called polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which he says are "deadly" and "have been discovered in a wide variety of foods and animals."

In a House speech, Ryan charged that federal agencies have done little in the last year "to combat this very serious environmental health hagard."

Monsanto, the only American manufacturer, "has taken some steps under public pressure, but more needs to be done," Ryan said.

A MONSANTO spokesman told The Globe-Democrat Friday that the company, in addition to various steps taken to control use of PCBs, has stopped sales of the product for use in "open" systems and is buying back used PCB for recycling or incineration.

The chemicals are in a Monsanto product called Aroclor, used in a variety of other products ranging from paints and paper coatings to electrical transformer fluids.

Surface coatings, adhesives and the like are "open" systems; transformers are "closed" systems.

"We've told customers not to throw the fluid away when they drain their transformers, but to send it back to us," the spokesman said.

"WE'VE BEEN DOING that for a full year now."

The spokesman said a new incinerator at the company's Sauget, Ill., plant, where the PCBs are manufactured, should be ready for use in three or four weeks.

Ryan said the steps taken by Monsanto, while helpful, are not adequate.

"Present control of PCBs is dependent on the efforts and good faith of the Monsanto Co. and the full cooperation of each and every one of its customers," he said.

"That is not enough to insure protection of our citizens from the menace of this deadly chemical."

RYAN SAID PCBS and their residues are "extremely toxic to animal life" and pose a "most frightening hazard" to human beings.

They do not dissolve in water and are capable of being widely distributed over the earth through air currents, he noted. Also, he said, they resist biological breakdown.

The congressman accused the St. Louis corporation of "a callous indifference to the public welfare" in refusing "repeatedly" to give him production and sales figures on the PCBs. The figures are needed, Ryan said, so scientists can determine "what quantities of PCBs have been and are escaping into the environment."

"However, Monsanto has informed me that it would make such information available to 'responsible government agencies' on a confidential basis," Ryan said.

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