PCB Cancer

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FYI
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Reports No Cancer Link In PCBs

The Monsanto Co. here reports it has found no cases of either malignant melanoma (tumors) or pancreatic cancer in current or former employes engaged in production of polychlorinated biphenyles (PCBs) at its Sauget, Ill., plant.

Three cases of melanoma and two of cancer of the pancreas were found recently among 72 employes of Mobil Oil Corp. who were exposed to a PCB product at a New Jersey plant. PCB is a dielectric (nonconducting) fluid used as an insulator and coolant in electrical capacitors and transformers.

Monsanto reviewed the records dating to 1936 of more than 300 employes at the Sauget plant, including 50 who have died. Seven cases of lung cancer were found among the 50 death certificates, which was nearly three times the rate for the general U.S. population.

However, cautioned Dr. George Roush, director of Monsanto's medical and environmental health department, this preliminary raw information was not corrected for age and other factors. What is now needed, he said, is a controlled study of the lung cancer cases to determine the smoking habits of the workers and their prior and post-Monsanto work experience and exposure.

He pointed out that three of the seven who died of lung cancer worked at the Sauget plant less than three months. Another puzzling finding was that the Sauget workers as a whole lived longer than the national average. He said the epidemiological study of Sauget workers would require another 12 to 18 months to complete.

"To date," Roush said, "the evidence developed from this preliminary study would suggest that the cases of lung cancer are not PCB dose-response related." He added that Monsanto's long-term feeding studies with animals would further indicate that PCBs are not cancer-causing.

The Sauget plant is the only Monsanto site manufacturing PCB products. Because of increasing environmental concern, the firm announced in January that it would voluntarily cease PCB production as soon as it could convert to a substitute product.

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