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Monsanto

PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

Monsanto Company
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February 17, 1978

Dr. Barry Commoner
Center for the Biology of Natural Systems
Washington University
St. Louis, Mo. 63130

Dear Barry:

Ever since you mentioned to us that Monsanto knew back in the 1930s that PCBs caused skin disorders, we have been searching the records and contacting former managers for a response. We believe we now have the facts in perspective and want to share them with you.

Here is what we found:

Although PCBs were tested repeatedly by Monsanto for nearly half a century, the material was never convicted of causing skin disease. In fact, ~~some cases of~~ skin irritation attributed to PCBs was traced to (correctable) impurities in the manufacturing process.

In 1933, when a skin disease began appearing among Swann Chemical Company workers in the PCB pilot production facility at Anniston, Alabama, the company immediately launched a medical investigation.

It was determined from the study that the skin eruptions were related to impurities in the intermediate steps of the manufacturing process and not to the final product (PCBs).

As a result of this investigation, steps were taken to eliminate the impurities, and the manufacturing process was changed to a closed system in which all chemical reactions occur in sealed pipes and vessels. ~~This permanently alleviated the problem.~~ Patch tests ~~conducted with PCBs~~ (then and later) never produced any evidence of ~~irritation~~. The outcome of this study was made public by two Atlanta, Georgia, dermatologists who had served as consultants during the investigation. ("The Archives of Dermatology and Syphilology," Vol. 33, p. 1027, 1936)

Monsanto, which later purchased Swann, did not experience any cases of skin disease among PCB workers during more than 40 years of PCB manufacture. However, over the years Monsanto continued to sponsor animal studies with PCBs. The results of these tests helped us determine safe exposure levels inside the plants.

MONS 003887

Dr. Barry Commoner

-2-

February 17, 1978

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, outbreaks of skin disease occurred on board ships that used PCBs in insulating capacities. However, studies of these incidents again traced the problem to other materials.

You might also be interested in having the attached copy of the New Scientist report of identification of PCBs in fish and birds. We believe this is the first published record of the PCB environmental saga.

Trust you are managing to endure St. Louis' ski lodge weather.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,



James E. McKee Jr.
Director of Public Relations

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Attachment

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