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Firm plans to stop making toxic fluid

ST. LOUIS (UPI) — Monsanto Co. Monday sought to head off environmentalists' efforts to ban a group of toxic chemicals known as PCBs by announcing it will phase them out of production.

Monsanto is the sole maker of PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, which is used primarily as a non-conductor of direct electrical current. The chemical has been a necessary ingredient in most power-generating equipment.

Environmental groups had petitioned the federal government to lower the permissible levels of PCBs in food on grounds the chemicals are a cancer hazard.

Federal officials have said PCBs have been responsible for liver cancer and reproductive failures in laboratory animals, and some workers using the chemicals have complained of allergic reactions.

F.J. Fitzgerald, a Monsanto vice president, said no timetable has been set, but the phase out "would be in a planned and orderly manner."

"As soon as we are satisfied that the electrical power supply industry's needs for usable, acceptable alternate dielectric fluids have been met, by whomever, Monsanto will voluntarily shut down its PCB manufacturing unit," he said.

PCBs have been used in manufacturing processes since 1930, but their presence as toxic substances in the environment was not detected until 1966 because they were confused with DDT, with which they have a similar chemical structure.

At a three-day conference on PCBs last November in Chicago, Assistant Interior Secretary Nathaniel Reed recommended the federal government impose a nearly total ban on the chemicals.

Reed said he was "deeply shocked by the pervasiveness of PCBs; they are literally everywhere."

He said exceedingly high levels of PCBs were found in fish from all parts of the country, indicating the nation's rivers and lakes were "in mortal danger."

Logan Herald Press

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But he had no sooner announced himself as a presidential candidate than hawk-eyed researchers found the idea imbedded in his little noticed speech which then abruptly received all the attention it had hitherto been lacking.

Reagan has since given a variety of explanations as to what precisely he meant by his plan, but so far the explanations have served merely to confuse and to detract from his campaign. He no doubt now believes that on the day he gave that speech, he should'a ought'a stayed in bed.

A POLITICIAN, by the very nature of his job, lives on publicity and quite often he dies from it. In the above-cited cases, both Carter and Reagan may well survive the magnifying glasses of the media and of their opponents, but in both cases they may well wish that their publicity were not as great as it has become.

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today's biggest headaches

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