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Monsanto claims government exaggerated dangers of PCB

By JERRY MASEK

Misinformation from government and industrial officials has helped blow the problem of PCB pollution way out of proportion, says an official of Monsanto Chemical Co., sole producer of the chemical for more than 30 years.

"PCBs are not an insignificant problem, but stories about the horrors of PCBs and deadly toxins just aren't true," said Robert L. Harness, Monsanto director of governmental affairs. He was in Cleveland this week to talk to several Monsanto clients and make TV appearances.

PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — are man-made chemicals banned since 1976, but which still exist in some electrical equipment. The oily substance has leaked from several Illinois Co. capacitors found atop 2,100 light poles in this area, and has attracted the attention of numerous environmental and civic officials.

"PCBs are not a cancer-causing substance, and there are studies by the National Cancer Institute which back that up," said Harness. "It's not a deadly toxin, either. There have been no documented cases where a human ever died from PCBs. It has a toxicity roughly equal to that of table salt."

"I'm not saying PCBs aren't a problem," he said, "but public hysteria is such that some people think they will die if they touch it, and that's not so. PCBs are to be avoided if possible, and there should be no unnecessary or indiscriminate use. Nothing should be eaten from a garden that has been contaminated. Once in the food chain, PCBs tend to multiply."

Harness feels the solution taken by industry and utilities is a proper one. A gradual replacement of electrical equipment containing PCBs over a period of years makes more sense than panicking and trying to do it all at once, he said. CEA officials estimate they will spend up to \$7.5 million to replace their 10,000 capacitors containing the chemical over the next six to 10 years.

Harness, an engineer who helped manufacture PCBs for 10 years, said the chemical is a combination of chlorine, carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. It could be made in most high school chemistry laboratories, but it requires

He said PCBs initially attracted industry in the 1930s because "it was very unique and remarkable, a highly stable chemical that resisted decomposition from all normal sources. But later, the very properties that made it so good led to problems. In the environment, it remains very stable, will not dissolve in water, and could stay around for 100 years."

He said a city would not want PCBs in its water system. However, if PCBs did enter, they would sink right to the bottom of the reservoir. PCBs would not dissolve and would not be found in tap water, he said.

He said his firm is aware of the PCB problem and is working with the government to correct it.

Monsanto, headquartered in St. Louis, is the fifth largest U.S. chemical company. The company no longer produces PCBs, but has 1,500 other products, including plastics, drugs and insecticides. Sales last year totalled \$6.5 billion.

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Monsanto Co. wins industry safety award

The Monsanto Co. of St. Louis, Mo., which maintains two manufacturing plants in Springfield, has been presented the Lamont du Pont Safety Award by the Chemical Manufacturers Association.

The award is presented annually to the two CMA firms that achieve the greatest percentage reduction in workplace injuries for two consecutive years in comparison to the three previous years.

Monsanto's worldwide recordable injury rates for 1979 and 1980 were 1.81 and 1.46 per 200,000 man-hours, down from 2.29 and 3.31 in 1978 and 1977.

For the chemical industry as a whole, the rate was 7.3 in 1979, while the rate was 9.5 for the entire private industry.

Monsanto employees approximately 1,900 people in its Birmingham Bend and Springfield

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