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Monsanto Erred, FDA Man Says

By ROBERT ADAMS
A Staff Correspondent of the Post-Dispatch

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2—The Monsanto Co. of St. Louis says it mistakenly identified a feed-producing firm as a petroleum company, and thus shipped chemicals to the firm that eventually contaminated poultry on the East Coast, a Food and Drug Administration official said today.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said this was the explanation given by Monsanto officers in connection with the recent discovery that millions of chickens were tainted by chemicals called PCBs.

The PCBs, short for polychlorinated biphenyls, are a DDT-like group of chemicals with a variety of industrial [illegible] in food.

Two weeks ago, federal officials reported that PCBs had leaked into fish meal processed at the East Coast terminal plant in North Carolina, a customer of Monsanto.

The fish meal was mixed into chicken feed, which later found its way into poultry eaten by many persons along the East Coast—although the levels of the chemicals in the poultry were said to be low enough not to cause harm.

The FDA official quoted Monsanto officers as saying that they were trying to stop the use of PCBs among their customers who used it in food-processing industries. They apparently had not realized the function of the North Carolina firm.

"Monsanto told us someone in the home office going over the list of customers for PCBs, [illegible] East Coast terminal was a petroleum plant," the FDA official said.

"From what they told me, I gather it was an accident on their part that caused the problem."

The official noted that tests were going on to see whether eggs, as well as poultry, had been contaminated. However, he said he expected the PCB

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level in eggs to be even less than levels found in the poultry samples which the FDA tested.

In those samples, taken from 18 southeastern states, the highest PCB level was just over one part for each 1,000,000—well under the 5 parts a 1,000,000 set by FDA as the apparent level above which harm might occur.

On the question of acceptable levels, the official said:

"No amount of PCB chemicals in poultry is really acceptable. It's very important that these be kept out of all food."

He said long-range studies were under way on PCB and other DDT-like chemicals to assess their over-all effect on the environment and health.

A spokesman for Monsanto declined to confirm the FDA comments. "In view of the current investigations by both the FDA and the USDA, Monsanto considers it inappropriate to comment on the subject at this time," the spokesman said.

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