

file:  
Krummrich

## CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

### *Monsanto takes part in an environmental program that belies its own habits*

Monsanto Co. gave away free refrigerator magnets and plenty of promises last Thursday night at the Missouri Historical Society.

The magnets were emblazoned with the company's slogan: "We pledge to be a part of the solution." The promises were printed on recycled paper and mouthed by a chemical-company spokesman. "You have to start with pollution prevention," Monsanto's Keith Miller told the audience. "It is unacceptable to continue to pollute our environment. At Monsanto, we have been focusing on pollution prevention for years."

The reason, of course, that Monsanto has belatedly decided to focus attention on environmental concerns is because it has historically been among the worst polluters in the St. Louis area, if not the world. Prior efforts to improve its corporate image were far less accommodating to environmentalists. In the past, one company motto heralded the fact that "without chemistry life itself would be impossible." Earlier yet, Monsanto countered *Silent Spring*, Rachel

Carson's seminal 1962 exposé on the dangers of pollution, by commissioning its own book, *A Desolate Year*, which presented the horrors of living in a world without pesticides.

Last week, the chemical company promulgated its revised public-relations position at the Historical Society's library at 224 S. Skinker. The Historical Society is the host of a series of monthly forums titled "Sustaining the City," which are scheduled to run through May. All of the programs are sponsored by the University of Missouri at St. Louis, Washington University and the American Institute of Architects. The latest discussion was dubbed "Environmental Cleanup: Common Problems, Diverging Solutions." Panelists included Miller, the chief of environmental safety and health at Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich plant in Saugat, Ill., and the Rev. Buck Jones, a veter-

an civil-rights leader, environmental-justice advocate and the head of Project HOPE.

At the forum, Miller parroted Monsanto's claim of having reduced its worldwide toxic-air emissions by 90 percent. He specifically cited an 88 percent decline in toxic-air emissions at the Krummrich plant between 1988

and 1992. But despite meeting that five-year goal, Monsanto, by its own estimates, still pumped 465,000 pounds of pollutants into the air in 1992. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated that as recently as 1991 the Krummrich plant dumped more than 23.2 million pounds

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The Rev. Buck Jones and Keith Miller

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of pollutants into the air and water. It rated the facility as the worst polluter in Illinois that year.

Miller contends that Monsanto's environmental record has continued to improve in both air and water emissions. His optimism, however, is not shared completely by Jones, who has been active in East St. Louis environmental issues for many years.

"East St. Louis is in the backyard of many chemical companies. Out of all those companies and industries, Monsanto is the only one that is making an effort to involve people in the process to a degree and invest in the community. At this juncture, I'm not sure I can see a consensus when it comes to polluters," says Jones. "I'm not convinced that business is ready to show compassion, to care and to allow consumers to sit at the table where decisions are made."

The activist has doubts about the current deregulatory bent of the Republican-led Congress as well. "It is a source of tension for me, when I view things that are happening in Washington, (including) efforts to turn the clock back on the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act," says Jones. "From my perspective, when I look at the 'Contract with America,' polluters are being given more authority to pollute."

In Jones' opinion, however, defending environmental regulations alone will not solve the problem. He believes there are certain human values that can't be enforced by law. "They concern inner attitudes, one's conscience," he says. "I'm not convinced that those who pollute are going to comply with (those) unenforceable obligations."

"It has been said wherever America's troubled cities are headed, East St. Louis will get there first," says Jones. East St. Louis is an environmental nightmare. It has over 22 abandoned toxic-waste sites. "We have had enough. We won't take it anymore. We will not surrender to the forces of death and destruction."

For Jones, the buck stops in East St. Louis.

— C.D. Stelzer