NEWS

Monsanto

E. V. John
(314) 694-2891
PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
Monsanto Company
800 N. Lindbergh Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri 63166

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J. R. SAVAGE

MONSANTO REPLIES TO CHARGE THAT PCB THREATENS ENVIRONMENT

ST. LOUIS, April 10 -- Monsanto Company said today it was well aware of the concern over possible environmental contamination by polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), an industrial chemical made by the company. The company began a six-point program in 1968 to properly identify and measure PCB in the environment. Steps have been taken to strictly control use of the chemical and replace those grades of PCB which linger in nature.

Monsanto's statement came in response to charges by Congressman William F. Ryan (Dem.) of New York that the discovery of PCB in the ecology represented a major threat.

Howard L. Minckler, Monsanto vice president and general manager of its Organic Chemicals Division, said, "We have and will continue to cooperate fully with governmental agencies investigating this problem. We also have been in close contact with our customers. Monsanto has spent over $1 million to verify or correct scientific reports, monitor the use of PCB and search for substitute products where needed. This program will be successfully concluded this year.

"It is unfortunate that Congressman Ryan evidently did not have all this information at his disposal. Just last month we participated in a U.S. Department of the Interior meeting where we exchanged ideas with some 40 scientists and told them of our findings and actions," Minckler said.

The Monsanto executive also noted that the use of PCB is misunderstood by some investigators. "For example, we do not know of any current use of PCB in insecticides. Even so, we are asking the U.S. Department of Agriculture to reject any insecticide which has PCB as an inert carrier," Minckler said.

"PCB is not a household product, as some have suggested," Minckler continued. "To our knowledge, it is not used in plastic food wraps, house paints, cellophane, asphalt or tires. The principal market is electrical applications where the chemical performs a vital function as an insulating fluid. In this use, PCB is completely sealed in a metal container. Other major markets employ similar closed systems."

Monsanto's PCB program was initially directed at proper identification of chlorinated hydrocarbons appearing in the environment. This research, confirmed by others, found only the higher chlorinated materials. At the same time, Monsanto undertook animal feeding studies which show PCB is not a highly toxic material.

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The second part of Monsanto's investigation was coordination with all customers and a rigid critique of its PCB manufacturing units. Although loss of PCB during manufacturing was negligible, production techniques were further modernized and new pollution abatement devices are continually being upgraded.

Monsanto has concentrated its further research on those few PCB compounds which degrade slowly. Alternate products for these grades, which retain the functional properties of PCB and present no potential threat, will be introduced later this year.

Minckler concluded, "Monsanto is seeking the best solution to this potential environmental problem. Action not based on reason and scientific facts can only result in greater problems. For example, we have been advised by one electrical equipment manufacturer that an immediate ban on PCB would result in major power failures throughout the world. This is not the answer. Proper use of this vital chemical and substitution, where appropriate, is the answer."

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