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Monsanto study shows high employee cancer rate

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A higher than normal incidence of lung cancer has been found among deceased employees who had once worked at the Monsanto Co. plant producing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), the firm announced.

However, Monsanto officials said the findings were preliminary and a full investigation would not be completed for another 12 to 18 months.

Dr. George Roush, director of Monsanto's medical and environmental health department, said there is no indication that the presence of the cancer was related to PCBs.

The Monsanto study is based on a review of the records of more than 300 current and former employees at its sole PCB production unit at Saugeat, Ill., since 1938.

Roush said Monsanto was able to identify 50 former employees who have died and that seven of these persons had lung cancer. This compares with 2.7 cases that would be expected according to National Cancer Institute statistics, he said.

Monsanto also said its study has found no cases of malignant melanoma or pancreatic cancer among current or former employees of the unit.

A recent Mobil Oil Corp. study reported finding three cases of melanoma and two cases of pancreatic cancer among 72 employees who had been exposed to a PCB product while working at a Mobil plant in New Jersey.

Roush said the absence of the malignancies in Monsanto's study at the Saugeat plant "casts strong doubt that the findings of the Mobil study were in fact related to PCB."

PCBs, the fire-resistant chemicals used mainly as insulating fluids in electrical equipment, have been termed a significant health hazard by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Monsanto, the only American manufacturer of PCBs, announced in January it intends to phase out production of the chemicals.