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Experts May Ask U.S. for Sea Pollution Data

La Jolla Scientist Says American Firm Has Refused Information on Chemical

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ROME—A group of 40 scientists meeting here is considering an appeal to the government of the United States for ocean pollution information, reportedly refused them by an American corporation.

Dr. Edward D. Goldberg, professor of chemistry at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography at La Jolla, said the action was being weighed as part of a new program to get at the scientific secrets of marine pollution.

The Monsanto Corp. has refused an appeals from world scientists to reveal production figures for polychlorinated biphenyls, better known as PCBs, he said.

Figures Needed

Production figures are needed to help compute the amount of PCBs leaking into the environment through accidents, Goldberg said.

The polychlorinated biphenyls may be the second most abundant synthetic organic chemical in nature following DDT, Goldberg added.

"Monsanto claims that they regulate the use of the material and are trying to cut down on leaks," he said. "They are playing God. They are boiling irresponsibly."

The world scientific community needs the data as part of a new effort to find out exactly what pollutants actually are doing the damage to the ocean system of life in the world's oceans.

Goldberg spoke at a press conference called to mark the opening here today of a technical conference on marine pollution and its effects on living resources and fishing. The meeting of 500 experts from 50 nations is being sponsored by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

Goal of Seminar

Action on PCBs developed in a seminar of 40 international scientists convened by Goldberg in conjunction with the larger conference to study means for monitoring, detecting and measuring the pollutants.

"As it is now, when we find a dead bird, we simply do not know what killed Cock Robin," Goldberg said.

"It may be a high incidence of mercury, of pesticides or PCBs or something else."

Finding the guilty party may be quite difficult, he admitted.

But a step in that direction is to know the input of potential killers into the seas, and that is why the scientists have appealed to Monsanto for details.

Monsanto is the sole producer of PCBs in the United States—the center of world production—but other companies produce the chemicals in other nations, Goldberg said. The PCBs have been in production since the 1930s, beginning about 15 years before the production of DDT, but their absorption by fish and other marine life was discovered only recently and by accident in a Swedish study aimed at detecting DDT in marine life.

Widely Used

The PCBs are used widely in the production of plastics, for electrical energy transformer fluids and solvents for paints, among other things.

It is not known how the chemical has leaked into the ecology, Goldberg said.

The scientists in the seminar here are preparing an appeal to governments to provide production figures on PCBs. In this way they hope to force the hand of the American government. Under American law, Monsanto is permitted to maintain its production figures as a secret because it is the sole producer, according to Goldberg.

The special seminar also has touched on other sea pollution problems and proposals, finding that:

—It is possible to tag with radio active substances, fluorescent dyes and chemicals the petroleum cargoes of ocean going tankers so that spillage and dumping can be traced.

—Regional and world monitoring systems are needed to set in motion controls to protect the oceans.

—The major controls are handicapped now by ignorance not only of the effects of pollution but also of basic marine life.

Goldberg said that man has been successful in only one area of sea pollution control. Disposal of radioactive substances has been so well-planned that the amount in the oceans probably will decrease.

The California scientist said that American scientists generally are opposed to the use of detergents, chalks, dispersants and other chemicals to handle oil spillage because they often threaten marine life more than the oil itself.

Add Nothing

"If you have an oil spill, add nothing to it," Goldberg said.

"Try to recover it. If you can't recover it, the dispersants may be more dangerous in themselves or they may make the petroleum more available to marine life.

Recommendations of the conference in the technical field will go to the U.N. environment conference in Stockholm in 1972, according to Roy I. Jackson, assistant director general of FAO for fisheries.

The challenge for the scientists at this meeting is to try to chart an attack on pollution that avoids both complacency and hysterics, according to the conference chairman, Alfred W. Needler, deputy minister of the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Forests.

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