

Zapped to

Tom Newcomb 12/20/77 - 4:30 cc GMEllsworth - SBN

Monsanto, U.S. Cancer Test Results 'Not Very Different'

By MARSHA MAROTTA

The results of a Monsanto Co. study which aims to refute a preliminary federal study linking occupational factors with high incidences of two types of cancer among workers at the Springfield chemical plant are "not very different" from the results of the federal study, the doctor who headed the federal study said Tuesday.

While the Monsanto Co. report said it did not find a statistically significant difference between the number of deaths which occurred and those expected for certain types of cancer, Dr. Robert Spirtas of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health said the report found a higher than expected death rate similar to the one the federal report found.

"It's just a question of whether you call the higher than expected rate statistically significant," Spirtas said.

"We called it significant and they didn't. But their results are not that different from ours."

Monsanto submitted its report to the institute along with comments criticizing the two-year study for its use of the national death rate rather than the county rate which the company used, Spirtas said.

"The company did not agree with our conclusions and was very critical of our choice of using the U.S. rates," he said.

"If county rates are stable and based on fairly large numbers, they tend to be more desirable to use in studies like this," he said.

"But the problem in this case is that county statistics are available only for cancer and not for other specific deaths."

He said further study could include both U.S. and Hampden County death rates but could not use some of each since the results could be misinterpreted.

The Monsanto study compared Hampden County death rates with its workers who died between 1950 and 1976, concluding there was no statistically significant increase in any of 18 causes of death studied.

The report did, however, find higher than expected deaths among workers from digestive cancer, cardiovascular diseases and cancer of the genital organs. It recommended further study of cancer of the respiratory system and

digestive and genital organs.

The federal study found higher incidences of digestive and genito-urinary cancers than expected. It also found workers between 20 and 34 had four times the rate of heart disease as people of the same age in the general population.

The federal report recommends further study to determine whether occupational factors can be blamed for the higher cancer rates, Spirtas said, while the Monsanto report denies any connection between the two.

Spirtas and his team of doctors will use the Monsanto report and comments along with comments from the International Union of Electrical Workers which represents many of the company's 2,000 employees and other doctors

to prepare a final report.

The final report and proposal for further study will be sent to the institute's director in Washington, D.C. who will decide whether to continue study.

"We're rewriting the report, and proposing that the institute do an independent study of the digestive and genito-urinary cancers," Spirtas said.

"The next logical step would be to look at the work histories of the workers who died to see if we can link where they worked with the type of cancer they died from," he said.

He said vinyl chloride, which the plant stopped producing in 1975, could be part of the cause of the higher cancer rates, but pinpointing any chemical might be difficult since the company makes so many and changes the list all the time.

"There's a chance that even if we found something, the company might not make the chemical any more and the whole exercise would be academic," he said.

"But if we can pinpoint something else, we or someone else could make the suggestion that they change or control the substance and it might make a difference," he said.

Spirtas said he will wait for a formal report from specialists who are studying the reports for the international union before completing his final report.

The federal study was started after a state study initiated by workers at the plant showed a higher than expected incidence of cancer among vinyl chloride workers at the plant.

The Daily News

Hometown

Wed., Dec. 21, 1977

21M

• Ware • Ludlow • Palmer
• Hampden • Wilbraham
• Monson • Warren