Harvard School of Public Health Report on PCBs in Caulking
Date: 7/28/04

A report issued by the Harvard School of Public Health, "An Unrecognized Source of PCB Contamination in Schools and Other Buildings," cites a number of possible concerns about the use of PCBs in building caulking in the 1960s and 1970s.

A number of points about the report need to be kept in mind:

(1) The overwhelming weight of the reliable scientific evidence does not establish that exposure to PCBs, except at very high levels, causes any adverse human health conditions. At very high levels, exposure to PCBs may cause a serious skin condition, called chloracne, and the temporary elevation of some serum enzyme levels, which return to normal after exposure ends. The scientific evidence does not support any causal link between exposure to PCBs and cancer or other serious human illnesses. While the report should be investigated, there is no need for undue concern.
(2) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been aware of this issue for a long time, and is currently assessing how to address the issue of PCBs in building materials, especially as it pertains to material disposal and how it might affect property transfers.
(3) PCBs were used as plasticizers in caulking until 1971, when old Monsanto/Pharmacia (now Solutia Inc.) voluntarily ended sales for "open system" applications like caulking products. Production for use in electrical equipment was voluntarily ended in 1977.
(4) The School of Public Health report is preliminary in nature, in that there were no measures of PCBs in dust or air and no evidence of exposure to people.

(New) Monsanto is currently handling these inquiries as a result of court directives in the ongoing bankruptcy proceedings of Solutia.