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Firm Restricts Sales Of Birth Peril Chemical

WASHINGTON — The manufacturer of an industrial chemical, called PCB, has decided to restrict sales of the chemical because of mounting evidence that it can induce birth defects in animals.

The Monsanto Co. of St. Louis said in a letter to Sen. William Ryan, D-N.Y., that it would no longer sell PCB for use as a water-resistant plasticizer or as a hydraulic fluid.

In April, the company asked the Department of Agriculture to prohibit the use of the chemical in pesticides.

Continues Manufacture
Monsanto said it would continue to manufacture the chemical for use as a coolant in electrical transformers because of its "unique properties" and because its emission into the environment could be controlled in "closed systems" such as transformers.

PCB, short for polychlorinated biphenyls, is chemically similar to DDT in that it resists biological breakdown. Monsanto has been making it for 40 years under the brand name AROCLOR.

There have been increasing scientific reports in recent years that PCB was being found in fish, birds, fruits and even in minuscule quantities in human "milk". There is evidence that large doses affected enzymes, and thus sex hormones, in certain animals.

The primary use of PCB has always been as a coolant in transformers, the purpose for which Monsanto will continue to use it. The chemical also appears in a number of paint and adhesives that require a high degree of corrosion resistance.

Household Products
Several years ago Monsanto began a campaign to market it widely for use in such household products as floor waxes, outdoor paints and caulking compounds.

The company declined to make public a list of all products now containing PCB. A company spokesman said that publication of such a list would "serve no useful nonpolitical purpose."

The spokesman said Monsanto did not know until recently that the chemical, a liquid that it sells in giant

drums, was being used as a pesticide.

According to an official of the Department of Agriculture, PCB is used in at least eight different brands of insecticides now on the market. He said the department had begun an "extensive review" of the hazards of PCB but had taken no action to prohibit its use.

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