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Anniston Alabama

A Monsanto Story

Produced by Shark Enterprises
FREE

Citizens Take Action

This publication will elaborate on how one of the worlds largest Multinational Corporations was held accountable for its acts of negligence in a small town in Alabama. Multiple references will be cited at the end of this production, including a report from the EPA.

1. Monsanto a brief history

2. Anniston, Alabama

3. What are PCB's?

4. Toxicity

5. Did Monsanto Know?

6. Citizens take action

We can't afford to lose one dollar of business.
—"Pollution Letter," declassified Monsanto document,
February 16, 1970

In any event, people started to talk in Anniston. The former union organizer from New York set up a first meeting in the funeral parlor of Russell "Tombstone" Williams, Jeffrey's uncle, which fifty people attended. They spoke late into the night of the deaths and illnesses that were devastating families (including those affecting young children), repeated miscarriages, and learning-related problems for the younger children. From this meeting came the idea of setting up an organization called Community against Pollution, presided over by Baker. In 1996, this church, along with 3000 other Anniston residents filed suit against Monsanto. In 1998, Monsanto settled with the church for 2.5 million and a new church van.

Individual claims took a step forward in February, 2002 when a jury ruled that Monsanto was in fact responsible for polluting the town of Anniston with tons of toxic PCBs. The ruling was a major victory for residents of the town, who have sued the company over damages to their property, their health and to their emotional well being. The company was found liable on six counts: negligence, nuisance, suppression of the truth, trespass, wantonness and outrage.

An official EPA report on the situation can be read here:

<http://www.combat-monsanto.org/docs/doc%20scan/pcb/EPA%20rapport%20Monsanto%20Anniston.pdf>

On February 14, 1961, the head of production of Hexagon Laboratories, another Monsanto customer, sent a letter to Kelly in St. Louis: “In reference to our recent telephone conversation, I would like to further discuss the incident wherein two of our plant personnel were exposed to hot Arochlor vapors generated by a broken pipe connection. For your information and records the two men developed symptoms of hepatitis as you predicted and were confined to a hospital for approximately two weeks. . . . Since we are dealing with a highly toxic material . . . it is felt that a more thorough and clearly written description of the hazards should be described under Safety of Handling.”

Monsanto did not follow its customer’s recommendation; it had only begrudgingly complied with labeling laws passed in 1958 intended to strengthen safety precautions in the handling of toxic products. “It is our desire to comply with the necessary regulations, but to comply with the minimum and not to give any unnecessary information which could very well damage our sales position in the synthetic hydraulic fluid field.”

In 1995, the congregation of a local west Anniston church was approached by Monsanto management and offered a large sum of money for their property. It was discovered that Monsanto knew that the area in which the church was located was heavily contaminated and needed to be destroyed so that cleanup could take place.

Monsanto A Brief History

Monsanto was founded in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1901, by John Francis Queeny. The company's first product was the artificial sweetener saccharin. In 1918, Monsanto made its first acquisition, buying an Illinois company that made sulfuric acid. This shift to basic industrial products led to the purchase of several chemical companies in the United States and Australia after its shares went on sale at the New York Stock Exchange in 1929. One month before the crash, which the company survived, renamed the Monsanto Chemical Company. In the 1940s, Monsanto became a leading manufacturer of plastics, including polystyrene, and synthetic fibers. Monsanto became one of the world’s major producers of rubber, followed by plastics and synthetic fibers such as polystyrene, as well as phosphates. At the same time, it reinforced its monopoly in the international PCB market, guaranteed by a patent that enabled it to sell licenses almost everywhere in the world. In the United States and the United Kingdom (where the company had a factory in Wales), PCBs were marketed under the name Aroclor. In 1954, Monsanto partnered with German chemical giant Bayer to form Mobay. During the 1960's – 70s, their Ag division became a major supplier of herbicide to the US military. In 1985, Monsanto purchases G. D. Searle & Company (NutraSweet). In 1997, Monsanto spins off its industrial chemical and fiber divisions into Solutia, Inc. In 2000, Monsanto merges with Pharmacia and Upjohn. In 2005, Monsanto purchases Seminis, the largest seed company not producing corn or soybeans in the world. In 2008, Monsanto purchases the Dutch seed company De Ruiter Seeds for about 855 million dollars.

Anniston Alabama

Anniston was founded in 1872 as a private business venture of Samuel Noble and Gen. Daniel Tyler. Their business was called Woodstock Iron Company and the town was originally called Woodstock. The town was actually a “company town”, meaning that everyone who lived there had a connection with the company. The first public lots were sold in 1883 and the town was renamed “Annie’s Town”, after Gen. Tyler’s daughter-in-law. This was still a critical time in the South, when rebuilding after the Civil War was an ongoing process. Tyler and Noble intended to make Anniston a model for industrial development in the new south. The Georgia Pacific railroad came to Anniston in 1883 and opened the town up to increasing outside industries and people. Railroad and textiles were part of the emerging businesses as was military training during the Spanish-American war. Long known as the “model city,” or the city with the “world’s best sewer system” because of the quality of its municipal infrastructure, the little southern town, rich in iron ore, was long considered a pioneer of the industrial revolution. Officially chartered in 1879 and named after the wife of a railroad president, “Annie’s Town” was celebrated as “Alabama’s magnificent city” in the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1882. Run by a minority of white industrialists who were smart enough to reinvest their money locally to foster social peace, it competed with the nearby state capital, Birmingham, to attract entrepreneurs. In 1917, for example, Southern Manganese Corporation decided to establish a factory there for the manufacture of artillery shells. In 1925, the company changed its name to the Swann Chemical Company, and four years later it launched production of PCBs, universally hailed as “chemical miracles,” which would soon make Monsanto a

What is absolutely breathtaking is that Monsanto knew that PCBs presented a serious health risk as early as 1937. But the company carried on regardless until the products were finally banned in 1977, the date when its W.G. Krummrich plant in Sauget, Illinois (an eastern suburb of St. Louis, the site of Monsanto’s second PCB production facility), was closed down. In 1937, Dr. Emmett Kelly, Monsanto’s medical director, was invited to a meeting at the Harvard School of Public Health, also attended by PCB users such as Halowax and General Electric, along with representatives of the U.S. Public Health Service. At this meeting, Cecil K. Drinker, a Harvard researcher, presented the results of a study he had conducted at the request of Halowax: a year earlier, three employees of that company had died after being exposed to PCB fumes, and several had developed a terribly disfiguring skin disease, which was then unknown but later named chloracne. In a panic, Halowax management asked Cecil Drinker to test PCBs on rats. The results, published in the *Journal of Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology*, were conclusive: the test animals had developed severe liver lesions. On October 11, 1937, an internal Monsanto report tersely noted that “experimental works in animals shows that prolonged exposures to Aroclor vapors . . . will lead to systemic toxic effects. Repeated bodily contacts with the liquid Aroclor may lead to an acne-form skin eruption.” Seventeen years later, the problem of chloracne was the subject of an internal report written in chillingly technical language: “Seven workers developed chloracne in a plant using Arochlor,” a Monsanto manager reported, and then calmly explained: “The fact that air tests, even in the presence of vapors, showed only negligible amounts of chlorinated hydrocarbons indicates that this type of intermittent but fiercely long continued mild exposure is not innocuous.”

Did Monsanto Know?

As early as 1966, Monsanto managers discovered that fish submerged into the same creeks in which the company dumped waste water turned belly up within ten seconds, spurting blood and shedding skin. They told no one. In 1969, they found fish in another creek with 7500 times the legal PCB levels. Company memos reveal the company's conclusion that "there was no reason to go to expensive extremes in limiting discharge from the plant". (Grunwald, 2002).

Monsanto warned some of its customers of the dangers of PCBs but never informed its neighbors that their health might be in jeopardy.

In 1993, the Alabama Power Company was breaking ground on land obtained from Monsanto. During this time, a landfill was discovered where Monsanto had illegally dumped PCB contamination. This turned out to be one of two unlined PCB dumps that Monsanto had not reported. It was shortly after this discovery that residents began to attribute their increased health problems to environmental pollutants.

A "mountain of documents" is now accessible on the Web site of the Environmental Working Group. How could people knowingly run the risk of poisoning their customers and the environment and not stop to think that they themselves or their children might be the victims of, to put it mildly, their negligence? I am not speaking of ethics or morality, abstract concepts foreign to the logic of capitalism, but merely of the survival instinct: was it lacking in the managers of Monsanto?

fortune and bring disaster to Anniston. By 1935, electrical appliances were becoming increasingly popular which led to increased demand for electrical insulator materials like PCBs. It was this year that the Monsanto Company purchased the Theodore Swann chemical company and began manufacturing PCBs in the United States. Monsanto continued to produce PCBs at its Anniston plant until 1971, eight years before the federal government banned PCBs as a possible carcinogen.

What are PCB's?

PCB is an abbreviation for polychlorinated biphenyls. They are mixtures of up to 209 individual chlorinated compounds known as congeners. These compounds have no odor and range from colorless to light yellow. Some PCBs can exist as a vapor in air. PCBs can enter the air, water and soil during their manufacture, use and disposal as well as from accidental leaks and spills during their transport. While working to improve the techniques for refining crude oil to extract the gasoline needed for the infant automobile industry, chemists identified the characteristics of benzene, an aromatic hydrocarbon that would later be widely used as a chemical solvent in the manufacture of medicines, plastics, and coloring agents. In the laboratory, the sorcerer's apprentices mixed it with chlorine and obtained a new product that turned out to be thermally stable and to possess remarkable heat resistance. Thus PCBs were born, and for half a century they colonized the planet: they were used as coolants in electric transformers and industrial hydraulic machines, but also as lubricants in applications as varied as plastics, paint, ink, and paper. From the 1930s through the 1970s, PCBs were produced in large quantities in the United States and throughout the world. PCBs were

manufactured for the purpose of insulating electrical wiring. PCBs did this job quite well due to the fact that the material conducted heat without conducting electricity. Safety codes once mandated the use of PCBs as insulation in transformers and other electrical equipment. They were also used in paints, newsprint adhesives, deep-fat fryers and bread wrapping.

Toxicity

The conclusion that PCBs were a human carcinogen is based on the following:

- 1) There is clear evidence that PCBs cause cancer in animals.
- 2) PCB composition changes after its release into the environment. The types of PCB compounds that are most carcinogenic are the compounds that bioaccumulate in sediment, fish and other animals. As a result, people who ingest these PCB contaminated animals and contact contaminated sediment are exposed to more toxic PCB compounds than PCB workers.
- 3) Epidemiological studies of PCB workers found increases in rare liver cancers and malignant melanomas.

Immune Effects: Human studies have revealed suppressed immune systems in those exposed to PCBs. (EPA,2002).

Reproductive Effects: Children born to women who worked in PCB factories have shown decreased birth weight and a significant decrease in gestational age at birth. Studies done on women in fishing villages where there has been exposure to PCBs have produced the same results. (EPA, 2002)

Neurological Effects: Studies done on animals and humans that have been exposed to PCBs have shown significant neurological deficits, especially in developing children, including visual recognition, short term memory and learning deficits. (EPA,2002)

Endocrine Effects: Exposure in humans to PCBs have shown decreased thyroid hormone levels, which are critical for normal growth and development. (EPA,2002)

““People ended up leaving because their vegetable gardens and water were highly contaminated.” said David Baker. We turned the corner from a lane full of potholes onto a wide thoroughfare with the sign “Monsanto Road.” It ran alongside the factory where the company had produced PCBs until 1971. A fence surrounded the site, which now belongs to Solutia (motto: “Applied Chemistry, Creative Solutions”), an “independent” company also based in St. Louis, to which Monsanto turned over its chemical division in 1997, in one of the company’s typical sleights of hand likely intended to protect it from the storm that its irresponsible conduct in Anniston was about to unleash.”