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Test results expected today

Test results are expected to show today whether or not there is a highly toxic chemical present in the mysterious solvent stored in Smitty's Road Oiling Co. tanks in Cedar Falls and Fort Dodge.

Officials said Thursday that scientists in federal and state laboratories would be working nearly around the clock Thursday night in order to have the results available by this weekend, and most likely today.

The tests are being conducted on two separate samples of the solvent, taken from tanks in both cities. The second sampling was taken late Wednesday night after state officials doubted preliminary results that indicated there was no polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contained in the solvent stored in Fort Dodge.

PCB is a colorless and odorless liquid that can cause cancer, birth defects and death if ingested. Virtually indestructible, it is manufactured in the U.S. exclusively by Monsanto Industrial Chemical Co., in St. Louis, although the company plans to phase out the product this fall.

While results of the tests are being awaited, a district court hearing is to be conducted at 10 a.m. today on an injunction issued last Friday that prevents Smitty's owner, Al Schmidt, of 703 Bluff St., from removing any of the solvent from his tanks.

Because of the potential health hazard, Black Hawk County Atty. David Correll sought and received the injunction, after learning of the bizarre incident from environmental officials in Iowa and Minnesota.

National guardsmen and local police have been watching the tanks in Cedar Falls and Fort Dodge continuously since Wednesday. They were assigned the sentry duty after it was learned that one of two tanks in Fort Dodge was bulging and leaking the solvent.

If PCB is found in the solvent, a whole new set of problems will have to be tackled and a number of precautionary measures will be put in effect.

Tests of the drinking water in the E. Dunkerton Road area of Cedar Falls, where Smitty's tanks are located, could begin Monday if PCB is found. Although officials say they have no evidence that the underground tanks may be leaking, they want to be sure that the lethal chemical has not contaminated the shallow water table from which many nearby residents draw their water with their own wells.

Tests of the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area drinking water may also be undertaken, officials have said.

The tests on the solvent are being conducted at the State Hygenic Laboratory in Iowa City, and federal Environmental Protection Agency laboratories in Kansas City, Mo. The separate testings were performed to ensure accuracy of the findings.