

Toxic Disposal Disclosed

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — State permits issued two years ago allowed the Earthline Corp. to bury large quantities of cyanide, arsenic compounds, mercury compounds, pesticides and other highly toxic chemicals at its disposal site in Wilsonville, Ill.

New records in the state Appellate Court disclose the identity and amounts of some of the hazardous wastes approved for burial at Wilsonville. Many are considered far more toxic than PCBs, the toxic chemical that started a controversy leading to a court-ordered closing of the site in August.

Although Earthline sought to keep the information secret, a three-judge appellate panel last week granted a request by the Post-Dispatch to examine the records.

The Appellate Court will hear arguments Tuesday on Earthline's appeal to reopen the disposal site, 40 miles northeast of St. Louis.

The court also will decide whether Earthline, which recently merged with SCA Industries of Boston, will be required to remove wastes buried at Wilsonville from December 1976 until the Macoupin County Circuit Court ordered the facility closed.

Along with the closing order, Circuit Judge John W. Russell ruled that the materials must be dug up and hauled away. But the Appellate Court said Earthline did not have to remove the materials during appeals, if the company posted a \$2 million bond.

Earthline attorneys will contend that the Circuit Court had no jurisdiction. They say the case should have been decided by the state Pollution Control Board, which sets environmental regulations and adjudicates enforcement proceedings.

The company also is contesting Russell's ruling that the site is a "nuisance" to the community.

"We would hope the court will completely reverse judge Russell's decision, or if it is determined he had the jurisdiction, will say he was dead

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wrong," Earthline attorney Stuart K. Dobbs said.

"Earthline's reason for existing is so spills like Love Canal won't happen," Dobbs said, referring to a toxic spill near Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Dobbs said he felt Russell "should not have second-guessed the EPA." State Environmental Protection Agency officials have testified that the Wilsonville site is safe. In addition, a federal EPA report of June 1977 said the site is "well-designed and secure."

Dobbs said the case is crucial to the hazardous waste industry, because a negative ruling would set a precedent in giving local courts control over sites.

Richard W. Cosby, first assistant attorney general, said, "Basically, the fact that the site is not fit to contain the materials is what we will be trying to get across."

The suit against Earthline was an outgrowth of widespread concern among Wilsonville-area residents that the toxic materials in the landfill might seep into groundwater and eventually contaminate wells.

The identity and amount of materials buried at Wilsonville have been a closely guarded company secret. The state EPA, which issues dumping permits, has refused to make public information on the permits, citing a "trade/secrets" provision.

But photocopies of permits containing all information except the origin of the hazardous materials were included by Earthline in materials submitted to the appellate court. The permits were issued from November 1976 until April 1977, when a suit to close the site began. They do not include permits issued during the court dispute.

The permits are among 21 volumes of documents and 32 volumes of abstracts in the Wilsonville case; the papers fill a small room in the basement of the state Supreme Court building.

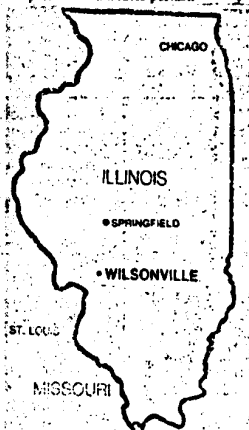
One permit issued in December 1976 approved disposal of 2,500 55-gallon drums of solid cyanide waste.

The cyanide permit contains the warning, "This material is extremely hazardous to the health of persons in contact with it. It is combustible and very toxic in contact with acids." Workers handling the drums were advised to wear rubber suits and breathing apparatus.

A permit dated Dec. 24, 1976, allowed disposal of 50 55-gallon drums of solid sodium cyanide. It cautioned that the material was to be placed in a specially prepared cell in a secure trench area, surrounded by a foot of lime and covered immediately.

Seven drums of sodium cyanide were among more than 600 drums of wastes from a pesticide manufacturing company that were approved for disposal in November 1976.

The wastes also include 19 drums containing arsenic compounds and two drums of mercury compounds. Burial of 232 drums of solid mercurous sulfide was permitted in a later permit.



"The cyanides and the arsenic and mercury compounds are among the most extremely toxic existing, and, given time, will migrate from virtually any disposal site — then there is nothing we can do about them," said Robert W. Allen, assistant professor of chemistry at Sangamon State University in Springfield.

Allen said one-tenth of a gram of cyanide is fatal to humans. He noted that lime or other insulating materials are needed to prevent escape of hydrogen cyanide gas, similar to that used in gas chambers.

The November 1976 permit also enabled disposal of hundreds of drums of DDT and other pesticides, including dieldrin, aldrin, endrin, heptachlor and lindane. The federal government has said that aldrin, dieldrin and endrin are carcinogens and has barred their use on crops.

A separate permit issued in November allowed the dumping of 400 drums of packaged laboratory chemicals, such as nitrates and other hazardous chemicals known for their ability to persist for a long time in nature.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), which Allen called "a suspect carcinogen," are one of the chemicals for which disposal permits were obtained most often.

Included was a revised permit enabling disposal of 4,500 drums of soil from Pittman, Mo., which were contaminated with PCBs and phenol. Earthline was hired by the federal EPA to remove the materials, which had been dumped illegally near a creek near the Meramec River.

After the publicity surrounding the PCBs, a suit was filed by the village of Wilsonville, Macoupin County and the Macoupin County Farm Bureau. Their aim was to close the disposal site.

Following are the substances involved in other separate permits issued to Earthline:

- 8,000 gallons of herbicides with pesticide floor washings. The permit contains a warning: "This material, even diluted with water, may have some severe health hazards."

- 1.4 million pounds of herbicides.

- 200 cubic yards of 2,4-D herbicide, spilled in a manufacturer's warehouse.

- 800 cubic yards of mercury-contaminated steel equipment, including pumps and piping.

- 40,000 pounds of wastewater treatment sludge contaminated with PCBs.

- 80 55-gallon drums of liquid PCBs.

- 80 55-gallon drums of "high-viscosity" liquid PCBs.

- 80 55-gallon drums of PCB-contaminated hydraulic oil.

- 4,000 PCB-contaminated drums of waste. Other permits were granted for wastes including sludge, oils, grease, paints and ink.

FDA Chief Opposes Extending Moratorium On Banning Saccharin

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON—Saccharin poses a special health risk to children, and their consumption of the artificial sweetener is rising, the head of the Food and Drug Administration said.

For this reason, FDA Commissioner Donald Kennedy told a House subcommittee, Congress should refuse to pass legislation that would extend a moratorium on banning saccharin for three more years.

The agency moved to outlaw the artificial sweetener in foods and beverages in March 1977, citing an apparent link between saccharin and bladder tumors in laboratory rats. But outcry from the public and the food industry prompted Congress to legislate a moratorium on the proposed FDA ban. The moratorium expired yesterday; several pending bills would extend it for three more years.

"Chronic consumption, begun early in life, may significantly increase one's risk of developing cancer as an adult," Mr. Kennedy said in testimony before the Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Health and the Environment. The number of young children who consume saccharin is rising, he said, and so "the adverse health consequences" of its use might "surface for another decade."

In a speech earlier yesterday before the Washington Press Club, the FDA commissioner estimated that 90% of the saccharin consumed in the U.S. is contained in diet soft drinks. He said he hoped that Congress "would consider the kids," who drink a lot of diet soda. But he acknowledged that Congress is "inclined to adopt the security of some form of legislation" postponing a saccharin ban.

In an interview after his congressional testimony, Mr. Kennedy indicated he would support legislation outlawing saccharin in diet soda, but allowing its continued use in gum, salad dressings and other foods. "That would be enormously preferable to a straight moratorium," he said.

FDA officials have previously said Mr. Kennedy doesn't intend to revive the proposed ban on using the artificial sweetener in food and beverages before he quits his post June 30. And if his successor does revive it, a final saccharin ban wouldn't likely take effect for 15 to 18 months or more.