WINSTON-SALEM, N. C.
JOURNAL
D. 71,564 — S. 94,256
WINSTON-SALEM METROPOLITAN AREA

State Is Still Not Sure What to Do About PCB Spills

SALEM (AP) — State environmental officials, considering whether to dig up more than 200 miles of North Carolina roadside where toxic PCBs have been dumped, are now looking for a place to put the tons of contaminated soil.

The officials, along with representatives of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, met in public Monday and then held a private session, but they failed to come up with a final recommendation for disposing of the thousands of gallons of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls.

The chemicals, known to cause cancer in laboratory animals, have been found this month along roads in Piedmont and eastern North Carolina. The State Bureau of Investigation is seeking those responsible, and there has been speculation that the chemicals were dumped from tankers by someone seeking to avoid new federal regulations governing disposal of hazardous chemicals.

Robert Carter, head of water quality for the state Department of Natural Resources and Community Development, said officials were considering digging one to three inches into the soil in areas where the contamination is considered above the tolerable level of 500 parts per million.

A list of more than 20 samples taken included 13 above that level.

If the soil is removed, a large area of state-owned land would be needed for storage, he said. Carter said no sites have been selected yet.

But the officials, who stressed that the PCBs do not represent an immediate threat to health, said they were considering placing activated charcoal on the spills as an alternative to digging them up. Carter said the charcoal would "fix" the PCBs, keeping it on the surface and preventing them from being washed away.

"We are dealing with a problem that does not pose an immediate medical risk," said Martin P. Hines, head of epidemiology for the Department of Human Resources. "We don't even think walking on the green, and exposure two or three times, would pose a risk."

Hines said his department is considering taking blood and urine samples, however, from people in the area of the spills as a precaution.

Hines said researchers have determined that the PCBs are a type manufactured in the late 1960s by Monsanto Chemical Corp. They were used as a heat transmitting agent in cooking substances such as fish meal, and in electrical transformers and capacitors, he said.

State officials were trying to get in touch with Monsanto for information about who might have been using the chemical, he said. Carter said the state is also conducting an inventory of all known PCB supplies in the state.

Hines said a smaller PCB spill in Kingston, Tenn., in 1973 cost $1.7 million to clean up.