

PCB PROTEST: Mrs. Tracey Willhoit makes her feelings known to speakers at a meeting Saturday opposing dumping of contaminated wastes in Wilsonville, Ill. Her shirt proclaims, "PCB. Wilsonville Killer." (Post-Dispatch Photo by Scott Dine)

Town Meeting Protests PCB Disposal Plan

By E. S. EVANS
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WILSONVILLE, Ill., April 30 — United States Representative Paul Findley (Rep.), Pittsfield, Ill. said Saturday that he opposed the dumping of hazardous wastes, such as Wilsonville residents are fighting in court, near any populated place.

He told a cheering audience at a meeting in this old mining community that it was proper for residents "to take up arms with peaceful means" to stop the Earthline Corp. from burying contaminated waste in clay pits on the edge of town. "Your voice has been heard in Washington," he said.

The meeting was called by the Rev. Casimir Gierut, pastor of Holy Cross Catholic Church and leader of the anti-PCB movement in Wilsonville, about 50 miles northeast of St. Louis.

The waste contains polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), highly resistant chemicals used in manufacturing. They can cause skin and liver ailments.

More than 200 persons attended the overflow meeting in the church hall. A few weeks ago, Father Gierut organized a meeting that attracted 800 persons opposed to the Earthline dumping operation.

The PCB-contaminated waste is being brought here from a spill in Jefferson County, Mo.

Earthline has operated the industrial waste disposal site on 120 acres here since last November. Company officers say that there is no danger to the town from the contaminated dirt to be buried in clay pits or from any other wastes it handles.

Wilsonville learned Friday that tons of chemically contaminated sludge from the sewer system of Louisville, Ky., will be buried at the site soon. Father Gierut called on the community "to keep Kentucky's toxic 'serve gas' out of Illinois and Missouri's PCBs in Missouri."

He asserted that the contaminated sludge is the equivalent of serve gas, a poison developed for the military but never used in war. Earthline officials say there is no truth to the comparison.

The Louisville sludge contains toxic chemicals used in making pesticides, flame retardant materials and dyes. The sludge had collected on filters of the city's waste water treatment plant and forced its closing after March 30 when fumes from the chemicals sickened 34 workers.

Representative Findley toured the disposal site after urging at the meeting that Wilsonville and Sinnemon County consider adopting zoning ordinances to control such land use. Neither the village nor the county now has such laws.

"None of these dangerous materials need be buried near any community, Wilsonville or any other," Findley said. "That's my opinion but unfortunately it's not the law at this time. Even if PCBs can be safely contained in clay for all time it would still be better to remove them from all population centers.

"I cannot comprehend why it would be thought to be desirable to dispose of them on the edge of Wilsonville. There must be a million other better places."

Findley assured the audience that its plight had been made known in Washington and the White House. He said that he had sent an article on the situation to President Jimmy Carter.

Carter wrote back that it was an interesting situation and commented that the population of Wilsonville, 700 persons, was the same as that of his home, Plains, Ga., Findley said. He wanted to know if persons were grown here.

Many in the crowd were angry over a decision by the Environmental Protection Agency not to disclose Earthline's records identifying types of material wastes that have been disposed of here since November.

The EPA has said it will not disclose the records because they contain trade secrets about the companies that send waste materials to Earthline to be dumped.

A good deal of concern by the crowd surfaced about what other materials possibly could be buried here. Ken Boyle, state's attorney for the county, said there, "I pledge to you that I will find out what else is buried out here."

Father Gierut said he would begin immediately circulating petitions calling on the state Legislature to enact a law to stop the dumping operation. He said he hoped to get 10,000 signatures from throughout the county and to deliver the petitions by motorcade to Springfield, where he and others would stage a demonstration.

He said that 40 of the last 60 persons who had died in Wilsonville had died of cancer.

Meanwhile, an Illinois appellate court late last week amended its previous order and allowed transportation of contaminated wastes through Wilsonville to the nearby landfill.

The action came after attorneys for the Earthline Corp. told the court that no other access route to the site was available for large trucks.

The waste is sail from another temporary landfill near Bittmore, Mo., in Jefferson County, that was contaminated by the PCBs. The PCBs were disposed of there by the Bliss Salvage Oil Co. of Ellisville, Mo.

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