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DAN RATHER, co-anchor:

As the water recedes, fear of flooding is giving way to a new fear about a potential health risk. Those floodwaters may have churned up dangerous materials buried long ago. Correspondent Sandra Hughes has the story from southern Illinois.

SANDRA HUGHES reporting:

Mr. BARRY BIEBER (Farmer): Many memories got wiped out out there.

HUGHES: For farmers like Barry Bieber and Hank Marqueardt, the worst of the damage from the Flood of '93 can't be seen yet--invisible toxins possibly floating through their homes and onto their land.

Mr. HANK MARQUEARDT (Farmer): It might not be something that'll show up today or tomorrow, but next year or 10 years from now, you know, it's--well, you know, it'd be in the ground and in the wood and everything else.

HUGHES: Just north of their farms, a toxic dump, which environmentalists called one of the most contaminated in Illinois, is flooded.

This is potentially dangerous, is it not?

Mr. KEN MENSING (Environmental Protection Agency): Yeah, I have to say it's potentially dangerous.

HUGHES: The danger lies underneath the old dumping site where Monsanto Company legally disposed of highly toxic wastes back in the 1950s, right in the middle of a flood plain, which was also legal at the time.

Mr. MENSING: The water that is saturated in the ground and in this landfill will just percolate out and towards the river.

HUGHES: Monsanto officials say they have concluded there is no human health risk, but admit they haven't taken samples to prove that.

So if there isn't any way to get accurate testing around there, you really don't know at this time whether there's a human health risk.

Mr. RUSS SACKETT (Monsanto): We--by looking at the the structure, it is clear that there has been no massive breach of the system.

HUGHES: The Environmental Protection Agency says there could be as many as 59 hazardous-material sites within the entire flood region which are leaking

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toxins, and that number may increase. Until the waters recede and soil and water samples are taken, flood victims will have little to relieve their fears that the toxins the river may leave in the ground and throughout their houses could keep them from ever returning home.

Sandra Hughes, CBS News, Sauget, Illinois.

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