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Press Release - Dictated to Region VII Press Officer
2:30 AM Sunday, February 11, 1979

On Friday evening, February 9, the Monsanto Chemical Company told EPA Region VII officials that the shipment of chlorinated phenolic compounds which was spilled in a railcar derailment in Sturgeon, MO on January 10 contained trace quantities of a contaminant known as ^{SP?} dioxane (TCDD). Monsanto reported three separate measurements averaging 37 parts per billion (24, 36 and 40 ppb). The company could not identify which particular forms of TCDD were present.

Acting on this information, Harry Gilmer, Region VII on-scene coordinator, ordered a sample of soil from the spill site sent to the University of Illinois at Champagne. There, with the assistance of Region VII scientists Dr. Billy Fairless and Dr. Robert D. Kleopfer, Dr. Carter Cook performed analyses which confirmed the presence of 2,3,7,8-TCDD at a level less than 0.01 parts per billion. "Mr Gilmer" team had anticipated the possibility of dioxane and had both performed some analyses and questioned Monsanto on the point.

According to medical scientists at EPA headquarters in Washington, the new information is of concern, but presents no cause for change in clean-up procedures currently underway. Dr. Joseph Seifter, Senior Medical Advisor to the Office of Toxic Substances, stated, "The presence of dioxane in the spilled material changes the scope of our review, but does not represent cause for alarm at the levels reported."

Dr. Seifter had lead a team of medical and public health experts before a town meeting in Sturgeon on Thursday night, at the request of Senator Thomas Hagleton. Concern among residents is still strong, as odors from the spill linger. Seifter's group answered questions on the known and suspected effects of phenol and various chlorinated phenolic compounds, especially orthochlorophenol, which were known at that time to be present in the spilled material. They were preparing a report of recommendations for further studies in the area, to be presented early this week.

Additional samples of the shipped material have been obtained from Monsanto by Region VII officials. These are being prepared for further analysis. Steven Jellinek, EPA Assistant Administrator for Toxic Substances, will be meeting with Seifter's group on Monday to coordinate further activities. "We intend to take all necessary steps to assure the continued identification and removal of these spilled chemicals," Jellinek declared. "EPA Headquarters will provide Region VII with any assistance needed to complete the job and protect the health of local residents."