

File PCB
Michigan

EPA may sue Army for its refusal to clean up DDT residues

The Environmental Protection Agency has warned the U.S. Army that refusal to clean up DDT residues near the site of the former Redstone Arsenal pesticide plant in Huntsville, Ala., and refusal to study the residues' health effects on area residents could lead to a civil suit.

The Army has refused to submit plans to EPA for the cleanup and a long-term study of Triana, Ala., residents because it contends the DDT leakage is the fault of Olin Corp., which operated the plant under lease (CW, Feb. 14, p. 12). But Paul J. Traina, director of EPA's Enforcement Division in the Atlanta regional office, maintains the DDT plant was "an Army facility—they are responsible." Traina adds that if the Army "wants to get to Olin, we have no objection."

Traina told the Army that its refusal to obey the EPA administrative order "leaves EPA no choice." He said he is considering referring the matter to the Justice Dept. for a possible civil suit—"the only enforcement action left to us."

Army officials said they expected a court action and that they are prepared to present a defense. One source said the Army has repeatedly offered to sit down with all parties involved to determine how best to solve the DDT problem, but that "they [EPA] don't want to talk with us."

While the question of liability remains undecided, EPA's immediate concern is the possible adverse health effects of the residues on Triana residents who have been eating DDT-laden fish from highly contaminated local streams. EPA's Triana has asked the federal Center for Disease Control, which has already conducted superficial tests of residents at the mayor's request, to determine whether in-depth studies are warranted.

Pennsylvania checks out dumping sites

Pennsylvania officials are pressing investigations and seeking funds for cleanup of two chemical-waste dumpsites in the state—one near Chester, the other in Philadelphia.

Rohm and Haas is assisting the Environmental Protection Agency in identifying 3,000 drums at the site near Chester, and Representative Robert W. Edgar (D., Pa.) plans to ask for \$1 million in federal funds for the cleanup. R&H says some of

the drums bear its labels and originally contained methacrylic acid. The company says those drums were used to ship the product to customers and that the customers or their agents then disposed of the containers. It points out that a check at the site shows none of the original seals were on the drums, indicating the original contents had been used.

The methacrylic acid drums originated at R&H's Bristol, Pa., plant and the company is searching its records in response to an EPA request for a customer list.

In Philadelphia, city Water Dept. and law enforcement officials are trying to determine the sources of 1,700 drums of waste chemicals illegally buried in a 60-acre dump owned by the city.

City Water Commissioner Carmen F. Guarino says construction work begun at the Southwest Water Pollution Control Plant near the international airport turned up the drums. The wastes apparently came from chemical manufacturing plants of various types. Preliminary identification of materials by an EPA laboratory include toluene, benzene, ethyl and propyl acetate, isopropyl alcohol, ethanol and N,N-dimethyl formamide.

Borings given to consultant Roy F. Weston (West Chester, Pa.) indicate that the site seems to have a 40-ft.-deep layer of clay underlying the site, so there may be no immediate threat. □

PCB, DDT levels drop in Great Lakes fish

While Michigan officials have found dramatic drops in the levels of DDT and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in fish from the Great Lakes, there will be no immediate change in the state's health warnings against consumption of certain fish species from state waters. That's the upshot of last week's meeting of the state Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR), Public Health Dept. and Agriculture Dept.

The state is reluctant to ease the consumption warnings until more fish have been tested.

According to John Hesse, chief of DNR's office of toxic materials, PCB and DDT levels were "down so far that we could hardly believe our eyes." In 39 fish samples, all but one had PCBs below the federal 5 part-per-million level. Mercury and dieldrin levels remained steady.

Sliffer laws, new water-treatment processes, and bans on some compounds presumably contributed to the improved levels. □

EPA sharply criticizes Dow dioxin findings

Dow Chemical's claim that environmental contamination by toxic dioxins occurs as a result of natural combustion and not because of industrial pollution was sharply disputed last week in a preliminary Environmental Protection Agency study.

Last fall, Dow scientists reported that TCDD (tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin) in the area around its Midland, Mich., pesticides plant and in fish caught downstream in the Tittabawassee River did not come from its chemical processes. Instead, the company said, the likely source of dioxins in local fish were the large combustion sources at the plant, adding that chlorinated dioxins are produced from other combustion sources such as refuse incineration, cars, fireplaces and cigarettes (CW, Nov. 22, 1978, p. 36).

But EPA, which recently analyzed Dow's data, came up with different conclusions. "No information, other than purely circumstantial evidence, has been submitted by Dow to support the premise that polychlorinated dibenzo-*p*-dioxins (PCDDs) and especially TCDDs are typical by-products of combustion," the EPA report says. The agency found that "Midland, Mich., and especially the area around the [Dow] plant, exhibits the greatest evidence for gross PCDD contamination among the various locations sampled," with levels 2-4 orders of magnitude greater than those reported elsewhere.

The agency also criticized Dow's analyses of fish taken from the rivers near its plant. EPA found that fish taken upstream had no indication of DCDD contamination while rainbow trout held in cages downstream showed detectable amounts of TCDD.

In addition, EPA disputes other Dow support for its combustion theory. The company had said its manufacturing plants do not emit high enough airborne dioxin levels to account for nearby soil contamination and that its dust and soil analyses indicated that the compounds were produced by incinerator and fossil-fuel combustion. Government scientists countered, however, that Dow presented no scientific documentation "other than weakly circumstantial evidence."

EPA is circulating its findings to other federal agencies and asking them to help determine the sources and extent of dioxin contamination for possible regulatory control. Dow, which had not yet seen EPA's study at CW presstime, noted, "We stand firm" on the contention that combustion at the Midland plant, not chemical processes, is the likely dioxin source. □