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Crews begin PCB cleanup using charcoal

By HOWARD TROLLER

Work crews from the N.C. Department of Transportation began spreading 80 tons of treated charcoal along roadides in Wilson and Edgecombe County Sunday in the first stage of an \$80,000 effort to clean up 270 miles of state roadides contaminated by potentially dangerous chemical spills.

Cy K. Lynn, transportation department spokesman, said in an interview that roadside treatment, begun on an experimental basis Friday in Wilson and Edgecombe counties, was stepped up to full-scale in the two counties Sunday. Treatment will begin today along contaminated roadides in 12 other counties where spills have been detected, he said.

The spilled chemical, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB), first appeared on roadides in early August. State officials said the spills were, apparently, the work of someone trying to get rid of surplus PCB chemical. The use of PCB is restricted because it is suspected of causing several human ailments including birth defects and cancer.

State Attorney General Rufus L. Edmiston said Sunday in a telephone interview that state investigators have a list of suspects, but he refused to say whether any arrests are expected in the near future.

"We're hot on the trail," Edmiston said.

"I'm not going to say whether there are individuals, in or out of state, or corporations, but we have a target now. It's the highest priority to the FBI right now."

"We want to find out who they are and why this was done quickly because this is the type of case where the evidence will be fleeing."

Lynn said the PCB removal would be conducted by spraying the roadides with activated charcoal to soak up the chemicals and then coated with emulsified asphalt to hold it all together.

More than 157 tons of charcoal will be needed to complete the job, Lynn said, and the dirt will be removed to a depth of three inches at some as disposal sites are approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The treatment began Sunday on secondary road 1003 in Wilson and Edgecombe counties near U.S. 261. Lynn said 15 to 20 transportation department crews will spread the charcoal today along all the state's affected roadides.

Preliminary estimates show the spill will cost \$851,000 to clean up. Lynn said \$125,000 for the charcoal spraying, \$675,000 for the excavation and replanting and \$50,000 to spread charcoal a second time. He said the state may seek financial assistance from the Federal Highway Administration.

MUNS 011392