West Side

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First of 2 Sections 2 Sections
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Toxic PCB chemical spill clean-up to take 2 weeks

Efforts are under way to remove soil in Jefferson County, Mo., contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls, known as PCB's. The chemical can cause skin and liver diseases.

Waste containing PCBs was dumped in the area last February by a driver by the Bliss Salvage Oil Co. As a result, officials say, chemicals have been leaking into a creek that flows into the Meramec River.

Federal spokesmen say the cleanup will take about two weeks.

Judge orders dumping halt at site in Wilsonville area

A Circuit Court judge today stopped an industrial waste disposal firm from burying contaminated hazardous soil in a landfill near Wilsonville.

Judge John Russell's temporary restraining order will remain in effect pending further hearings.

Wilsonville and State's Atty. Kenneth Boyle of Macoupin County sought the injunction because they said the chemical, PCB, could be dangerous to the health of local residents.

Madison County State's Atty. Nicholas Byron said today, "If we have jurisdiction, we'll jump in too if Kenny Boyle will let us."

Byron said Cahokia Creek, which passes between Wilsonville and Staunton, flows through Madison County on its way to the Mississippi River.

Boyle said he would ask the court "to close the whole operation down."

The Earthline Corp., a subsidiary of the Sanitary Corp. of America, operates the Wilsonville landfill as a hazardous materials landfill regulated by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

EPA officials maintain the site is safe, but residents of Wilsonville Friday and at a series of meetings over the weekend, demonstrated that they are angry and claim they were never told the purpose of the landfill.

Boyle said one reason he sought the preliminary injunction is to avoid "the prospective violence which may occur if this is not stopped."

Town residents, led by city officials and a Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Casimir Glerut, threatened to block the entrance to the landfill if the landfill company did not stop the dumping. They did not carry through on the threat, however.

The contaminated earth is being transported in sealed drums from a Jefferson County, Mo. farm where the Russell Bliss Salvage Oil Co. of Ellisville, Mo. had dumped waste oil containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). PCBs are considered highly toxic in large doses and carcinogenic in small doses over prolonged periods.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and the U.S. Coast Guard are trying to clean up the Missouri dump and have been transporting the contaminated dirt to the Wilsonville landfill.

Mike Rapps, the Illinois EPA official who granted the special permit needed to haul the contaminated dirt to the Wilsonville landfill, said today, "I don't see any problem at all, frankly."

He suggested that the reaction was like "mass hysteria" and maintained there is no danger. He said he checked with U.S. EPA officials at the Jefferson County dump and they reported the contaminated earth has about "2.4 parts per billion (of PCBs) and that's about the ambient level of Lake Michigan." Rapps said almost everyone probably would consume that much PCBs every day.

Rapps maintained that as part of the state EPA procedure, Wilsonville city officials and adjacent land owners to the Wilsonville landfill were told well in advance that the landfill would be for "industrial waste management."

Rapps said he does not know whether the word "hazardous" was used. He said the word is emotional and is "one that I avoid using."

There are 20 industrial waste management sites in Illinois.

James Manzatto, a Wilsonville resident whose property adjoins the landfill, maintained today that he was told by a landfill company official that "they would stop trying to buy hazardous or toxic materials to that site, that they didn't need that money."

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