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PCBs in road oil may be source of pollution

ROCHESTER, Minn. (AP) — The application on dirt roads of an oil, once used in electrical transformers, could be the source of the Polychlorinated Biphenol (PCB) pollution found recently in several southeastern Minnesota bodies of water.

A Pollution Control Agency (PCA) quality specialist, Joel Schilling, said Thursday the reuse of such oil on roads, or as a fuel, could account for the intermittent levels of PCB detected in the Zumbro, Cannon and Whitewater Rivers.

PCB is sometimes used in certain types of electrical transformers. And, used transformer oil is frequently collected along with used crankcase oil for blacktopping, use on roads and a fuel. Schilling said it would be difficult to determine if transformer oil containing PCB would be included in road applications. However, he said it could account for part of the pollution since the route from road application to the river could come from normal runoff.

Schilling also said PCB is difficult to destroy and that because of its expense it can be returned to the manufacturer for reprocessing.

Monitoring records of the Zumbro River show no detectable levels of PCB from July 1973 through March 1974, but the May 21, 1974 record shows 3.54 parts per billion (ppb) with a drop of 1.94 ppb in July 1974.

The Cannon River had a reading of 1 ppb to July 1973 and on May 21, 1974 it rose to 1.74 ppb dropping to undetectable levels by July 1974.

The Whitewater near Utica had a July 1974 reading of 1.2 ppb dropping to undetectable levels at Beaver.

Highest record on the Mississippi River below Lake Pepin was in the LaCrosse, Wis. area where one reading was 12.2 ppb. Readings at the Alma Dam were below detectable levels.

PCA and U.S. Food and Drug Drug Administration officials at Minneapolis agreed the scattered patterns indicate isolated occurences.

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