

Chemical Contamination Found At Creek

By Jerri Stroud
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Results of tests along Dead Creek in Sought and Cahokia show that some chemicals dumped in the creek have contaminated soil and ground water in areas beyond the creek banks, says James Kelly, a chemist with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

The creek, which lies between Quarry Avenue and Judith Lane about a quarter mile east of Illinois Route 3, was first shown to have high concentrations of chemical contamination in test results released in September. The tests were made after residents of the area complained that the ditch cracked in hot weather and after a resident said his dog died after rolling in the creek.

The creek was fenced off after more

tests confirmed the chemical contamination.

Kelly said that results are back from 55 percent of the samples taken in and around the creek in the fall. A report on the results of 59 to 60 tests of soils and groundwater could be available by next week.

The worst contamination of soils is in the extreme north end of the creek, just south of Quarry Avenue in Sought. About 40 yards from the street, contamination of the surface soil is as high as 17,000 parts per million of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a chemical suspected of causing cancer.

But Kelly said the level of contamination declines rapidly deeper in the soil. This is because PCBs have a strong tendency to bond to soil.

Other chemicals found in the north end of the ditch were

monochlorobenzene and dichlorobenzenes, which are moderately toxic when absorbed through the skin.

Some biphenyls, compounds related to PCBs, were found in some areas of the ditch. These were not shown in previous tests.

Low levels of chemical contamination were found in ground water northeast of the north end of the ditch. But west and east of the ditch, there was little contamination of ground water.

The heaviest concentrations of contamination by heavy metals were found in the south end of the ditch near Judith Lane, said Kelly. Water tends to percolate at that end, and it would be expected that metals would accumulate there, he said.

Kelly said that only low levels of

PCBs were found in water in a pond at the southeast end of the creek. The pond is connected to the creek by a drainage cut. High levels were found in pond sediment and in the drainage cut.

South of Judith Lane, low levels of PCBs and metals were found as far as three blocks from the sealed-off area. But further south, near the Cahokia sewage treatment plant, only normal levels of chemicals were found.

After test results are completed, the information will be analyzed by hydrologists and geologists working for the Illinois EPA to determine the extent of cleanup work needed at the creek. Kelly would not estimate the cleanup cost except to say that it will be "substantial." Other estimates have put the cost in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.