PCB protest toned down; no arrests made

From Staff Reports

AFTON — The protest against PCB disposal in a Warren County landfill turned quiet Thursday with a silent march by 50 demonstrators and no arrests.

Demonstrators made no attempt to block trucks hauling the contaminated soil to the landfill. It was the first workday since the pickup began Sept. 15 that no one was arrested.

As huge yellow dump trucks roared past, protesters silently walked 2½ miles from an N.C. Highway Patrol barricade to the landfill entrance, stood face-to-face with a line of troopers for 10 minutes and then walked back.

Previous demonstrations have been marked by chanting and singing with protesters sitting or lying in the road to block trucks. More than 400 arrests have been made since Sept. 15, most on charges of blocking traffic.

The state is picking up soil along 210 miles of highway that was contaminated by an illegal dumping of PCBs in 1978. The chemical has been linked with cancer in laboratory animals.

Opponents contend the landfill is environmentally unsafe and that Warren County was chosen for the site because it is poor and predominantly black. State officials have argued that the landfill poses no major threat and denies charges of racial bias in the location decision.

Kenneth Ferruccio of Warrenton, spokesman for Warren County Citizens Concerned About PCBs, said the change in tactics resulted because some opponents who have been arrested several times might not be able to pay additional bonds to get out of jail.

"It (lack of arrest) has more to do with the economics of marching rather than a lack of commitment to stopping the trucks," he said.

