Levels of DDT High In Fishing Town Residents

Jay: For your information
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TRIANA, Ala. — About 500 residents of this small Tennessee River fishing town, many jobless because of high DDT levels in their fish, heard disheartening news yesterday about their own blood samples.

According to the U.S. Health Department's Center for Disease Control, more than one-fourth of the 499 persons sampled had DDT levels 10 times the nationalaverage.

PCB, ANOTHER banned chemical recently found in Huntsville water treatment plants, was found to be up four times the national average in the blood samples taken from Triana residents.

Howard Zeller, deputy director of the Environmental Protection Agency regional office in Atlanta, said PCB traces have been found in Huntsville and Redstone Arsenal sewage treatment plants. Larger amounts of PCB have been found at two landfills.

PCB, a chemical used in electrical insulation materials, was banned in 1976, according to Dr. Kathleen Kreis, because it causes skin ailments, affects the liver and is a suspected cancer-causing agent.

DR. KREIS, AN epidemiologist for the Center for Disease Control, gave the report on DDT and PCB found in blood samples after the dedication of this community's first public health clinic yesterday.

She said the "most significant finding" of the blood sample study was that DDT accumulates in the system and does not, as was once believed, level off after reaching a certain plateau.

The U.S. average concentration of DDT is 16 parts per billion, but the average for the 499 Triana residents tested was 159.4 parts per billion.

SHE SAID 33 people tested had DDT levels of 500 parts per billion, more than 30 times the *national average, six people had levels twice that* high and one man was found to have 2,830 parts per billion — a staggering 175 times higher than normal.

The full effects of DDT on the human body are not known, Dr. Kreis said, but persons with high levels of DDT in their bloodstream "tend to have higher serum cholesterol and triglycerides and also have higher levels of proetin in the liver."

The use of DDT was banned by the federal government in 1970 and the Olin Chemical Corp. plant that manufactured DDT in an old U.S. Army building at Redstone Arsenal was dismantled the following year.

FEDERAL OFFICIALS are seeking to force Olin to clean up the DDT residue left behind and are seeking $3 million in a federal court lawsuit in damages against Olin.

Zeller said the EPA investigating team found PCB in sludge at the sewage treatment plants but not in the water being discharged, "which tells us there was PCB (in the sewage) at some time, but the treatment plant is doing what it was supposed to do."

He said one of the private landfills is operated by Technical Micronics, a waste treatment firm that recently took over a waste treatment plant in a Huntsville industrial park.

A SPOKESMAN FOR the firm said 300 large metal barrels of unknown chemicals were on the property, some leaking into the ground, when the change in management took place.

Last week, the state Water Improvement Commission ordered Technical Micronics to clean up the property and properly dispose of the chemicals by May 1.

Zeller declined to indentify the other source of PCB because "there may be some legal action forthcoming."

TO THE PEOPLE of Triana, after-the-fact actions provide little comfort.

Triana Mayor Clyde Foster said he learned Friday that the state health department was aware of the existence of PCB in local waters in 1970 and mentioned it in a report that got little notice when the chemical was banned six years later.

"The ones in power knew PCB was in Indian Creek (a Tennessee River tributary) nine years ago and we just learned yesterday this information was in the hands of the federal and state officials, and that's just a damn shame," the mayor said.

HE SAID THAT in the past, "we haven't been able to associate these things (PCD and DDT) with our health problems because we simply didn't know...but now we know and we're going to track all of the people showing any ill effects.

"If someone has a cold, we want to know about it," the mayor said, adding:

"WE'RE JUST APPALLED that we're the most polluted city in the United States."

Several area residents took up the call, using the dedication of the health center as a forum for venting their anger and frustration.

"It's just like a conspiracy against this community," said Dot Murphy. "Some high-handed bureaucrats probably thought to themselves, 'Well, those people are just a bunch of white and black trash, just let them go ahead and die.'

"WE'RE NOT ANIMALS, we're human beings!" she shouted. "And not even animals should be treated the way we've been treated and are still being treated."

Bobby James, president of the Whitesburg Commercial Fishing Association which is seeking $500 million from Olin Chemical Corp. because EPA has banned local fishing, summed it up:

"We can't get any federal help when the federal government ought to have some sense of responsiblity...

"If you're going to kill us, why not kill us all at once?"

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