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Oil dumped in river contains high concentrations of PCBs

WINONA (AP) — A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) official says transformer oil routinely dumped near the Mississippi River by a Winona scrap dealer has been found to contain high concentrations of pollutant PCBs.

The oil may have contaminated the water table in the area, Willis Mattison added Thursday. The water table will be checked.

Mattison, of the Rochester PCA office, said Herman Weisman, owner of Sam Weisman and Sons, was ordered to stop dumping the material and to clean up oil-soaked earth on his property near the river.

PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — are known to cause reproductive failure and birth defects in animals. The chemicals are suspected of causing cancer in laboratory rats. PCBs have been found in fish taken from Minnesota rivers, including the Mississippi.

Mattison said PCA officials, acting on a local complaint, tested Weisman's dump site last Thursday and sent samples of earth to State Health Department laboratories. The results which came back Wednesday, Mattison said, showed soil concentrations of 14 to 16 parts of PCB per million.

Mattison said test holes dug at the site went down four feet, until the water table was hit. He said the earth was completely saturated with a transformer oil, Askerel, which had been drained from transformers.

Weisman told the PCA that he has purchased transformers, for salvage purposes, from only two sources — Northern States Power Co. in Winona and Richard Antonson, a Winona scrap dealer.

Mattison said Weisman told officials that the Antonson transformers come to his yard with oil already drained but that NSP until recently has shipped him transformers containing oil.

Thomas Jepson, NSP district manager, said NSP has shipped no transformers containing Askerel to any dealer since awareness of the dangers of PCBs began in 1970.

Said Jepson: "We haven't sold anything to Weisman or anybody else since 1970 that contained oil with PCB. We have complete records including serial numbers of sales."

Mattison said Dan Pelowski, in charge of shipping NSP transformers, told officials he delivered some transformers to Weisman in the past few days but considered NSP's obligation over after delivery.

Pelowski did not deny that the transformers contained oil, Mattison said, but said the oil may have been of a type not containing PCBs.

Weisman and NSP have begun cleaning up the polluted soil, dumping it into a plastic-lined dike on the Weisman property until other means of disposal can be found.

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