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DEQ supervises cleanup

Poisonous PCBs sprayed over lot in Clackamas

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Poisonous PCBs were sprayed all over a parking lot in Clackamas, southeast of Portland last week when an electric capacitor exploded near a Safeway warehouse.

A crew from a firm called Western Environmental Services dug up contaminated soil and pavement, sealed the material in steel drums and will deposit them in a landfill this week at Arlington, the state's only disposal site for hazardous wastes.

The cleanup took place under the supervision of the Department of Environmental Quality despite no state laws on the books that declare PCBs as environmentally hazardous waste.

PCBs are polychlorinated biphenyls, nearly indestructible chemical compounds usually in the form of colorless fluids. PCBs are used primarily as dielectric fluids, or nonconductors of direct electric current, in heat transfer systems enclosed in high-voltage capacitors and transformers.

Scientific evidence indicates that PCBs can mutate genes and perhaps cause cancer. Jim Swenson, DEQ public affairs officer, said they are most dangerous in the food cycle, particularly in fish, because they accumulate to levels toxic to primates.

PCBs were banned in Japan in 1968 after 2,000 persons ate rice oil contaminated with PCBs. They suffered skin lesions, facial swelling, eye disorders and neurological disorders. Infants born to exposed women had grayish-brown skin and eye disorders.

Monsanto Corp., chief manufacturer of PCBs, has been phasing them out since 1971 and will reach that goal by the end of this year. PCBs previously appeared in hand soaps, carbonless duplicating paper, asphalt, and as plasticizers and sealers.

Portland General Electric Co., owner of the capacitor that exploded in Clackamas, has $4 million in capacitors and transformers in Oregon, says Rep. Roger Martin, R-Lake Oswego.

Pacific Power & Light Co. owns $5 million in capacitors and transformers that contain PCBs. Other large-scale users are the Bonneville Power Administration, Salem Electric and big industry, such as lumber and aluminum companies.

Martin, House minority leader, introduced a bill in the Oregon Legislature that would order a three-year phaseout of manufacture, sale or use of PCBs in decreasing concentrations.

Under HB3030, by 1980 PCBs could not be used in concentrations greater than 100 parts of PCB per 1,000,000 parts of the product, such as dielectric fluid.

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