

EPA NEWS RELEASE OF 9 a.m. SUNDAY, FEB. 11

(Phoned from EPA Region VII Public Affairs Department to UPI, AP, Kansas City Star, Columbia Daily Tribune).

On Friday evening, Feb. 9, the Monsanto Chemical Co. told EPA Region VII officials that the shipment of chlorinated phenolic compounds which was spilled in a rail car derailment in Sturgeon, Mo., on Jan. 10 contained trace quantities of a compound known as dioxin (TCDD). Monsanto reported three samples measured, averaging 37 ppb (34, 36, 40 ppb). The company could not identify which particular forms of TCDD were present. Acting on this information, Harry Gilmer, EPA Region VII on-scene coordinator, ordered the extraction of a sample of soil taken at the spill site sent to the University of Ill., Champaign. With the assistance of Region VII, Dr. Billie Fairless, Dr. R. D. Kleopfer, Dr. C. Cook of the University performed analyses which confirmed the presence of 2,3,7,8 TCDD at a level less than 0.01 ppb.

Gilmer's team had explored the possibility of dioxin contamination and had both performed some analyses and had contacted Monsanto on this point. According to medical scientists at EPA headquarters in Washington, DC, the new information is of concern but presents no cause for change in the cleanup procedures currently underway. Dr. J. Seister, senior medical advisor to the office of toxic substances, stated, "The presence of dioxin in the spill material changes the scope of our review but does not present cause for immediate alarm in the levels reported."

Dr. Seister had led a team of medical and public health experts before a town meeting in Sturgeon on Thursday night held at the request of Senator Tom Eagleton. Concern among residents is still strong as odors from the spill linger. Seister's group answered questions on the known and suspected effects of phenol and various chlorinated phenolic compounds as well as orthochlorophenol which were known at that time to be present in the spill material. They were preparing a report of recommendations for further studies in the area to be presented early this week.

Additional samples of the spill material have been obtained from Monsanto by Region VII officials. These are being prepared for further analyses. Steve Jellineck, EPA assistant administrator to toxic substances will be meeting with Seister's group on Monday to coordinate further activities. "We intend to take all necessary steps to assure the continued identification and removal of these spill chemicals," declared Jellineck. "EPA headquarters will provide Region VII with any assistance needed to complete the job and protect the health of local residents."

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