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North Carolina Toxic Roadside To Be Dug Up

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina will dig up more than 260 miles of rural roadside contaminated by a chemical containing toxic PCBs at a cost of as much as \$2.5 million.

The excavation, and a search for a suitable site to permanently deposit the estimated 52,000 tons of tainted grass and soil, were announced Thursday by Gov. Jim Hunt as the state's latest reaction to the mysterious spill found in 15 counties this month.

Hunt, calling the apparently deliberate spill a "dastardly act," also said county health officials will hand-deliver printed notices on the dangers of prolonged exposure to PCB, polychlorinated biphenyls, to all residents of contaminated areas. Signs will go up around all affected areas warning people to stay off the damaged soil until it is removed. But Hunt also repeated that health officials don't think the toxic material, dumped in violation of strict federal regulations on hazardous chemicals, poses an immediate medical threat.

The PCB has been traced to a type manufactured in the late 1960s by Monsanto Chemical Corp. for use in electric transformers and capacitors. It no longer is produced.

Health officials say PCBs, suspected as a possible cancer-causing agent when administered to laboratory animals in large doses, build up in human fatty tissues and may cause long-term health problems.

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today's editorials

At last, the ban

After a decade, PCBs will be outlawed

NEXT Monday is an important day. The Environmental Protection Agency will conduct a hearing on the coming ban on polychlorinated biphenyls, a group of industrial compounds in use since 1929.

The ban on PCBs was ordered by Congress in the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976.

The PCB ban was an appendage to a general grant of power to EPA. The 1976 law gave EPA its first authority to control, limit or ban the use of any chemical deemed to present an unreasonable risk of injury to health or the environment.

The main use of PCBs was as insulating fluid in electrical equipment such as transformers and capacitors. But the compounds also were used in making adhesives, sealants, printing inks, coatings and waxes.

Three qualities make PCBs a classic threat.

✓ They cause death and reproductive defects in fish, birds and mammals. Of

these harmful effects, there is no doubt. So far as we know, the PCB threat has been proven real to the satisfaction of everyone.

✓ PCBs disappear only very slowly.

✓ Finally, PCBs move through the food chain, with traces of the millions of pounds turning up far from industrial centers . . . in the Hudson River, the Great Lakes, the upper Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico.

The first rattle of the PCB chamber came in 1968 when some 1,000 Japanese citizens were made seriously ill by PCB-contaminated rice oil.

In 1972, the U.S. government put on the first pressure with an EPA recommendation for production curbs. The only maker, Monsanto, voluntarily quit selling PCBs to consumers who released them into the environment. Last year, Monsanto voluntarily quit making PCBs.

The EPA hearing on the actual ban should be no more than a formality. But it's a formality well worth the observance.

As it turned out, the U.S. seems to have gotten enough jump on PCBs to head off significant, irreparable damage to the environment.

The achievement is a combination of luck, regulatory alertness and cooperation from the regulated industry.

To keep the environment reasonably safe and reasonably clean, the U.S. will continue to need all three: luck, strong regulators and cooperation from the private sector.