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Sangamo PCB Amounts Up

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PICKENS — With time running out to clean up its wastewater, the Sangamo Electric Co. once again is headed in the opposite direction by discharging larger amounts of PCBs into the environment.

Samples of the company's wastewater discharge collected last week contained six times the amount of the toxic chemical previously recorded.

Analyzed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lab in Athens, Ga., the samples indicate the plant dumped about two pounds of the chemical into a Lake Hartwell tributary on Sept. 16.

It was the third straight set of EPA-tested water samples to show an increase in PCB levels.

The latest figures mean it will be "very difficult" for Sangamo to stop dumping PCBs by early October, said John Lank, EPA coordinator for water enforcement in South Carolina.

Lank said the latest increase, like the one before it, probably was caused by a churning of PCB-contaminated sediment at the bottom of Sangamo's aeration lagoon.

Lab technicians detected 194 parts per billion (ppb). Earlier this month the concentration was as high as 33.3 ppb. The first EPA samples, on Aug. 24 and Aug. 26, were as high as 10.5 ppb.

The company has until Oct. 2 to cut its PCB discharge to less than one part per billion. In Sangamo's discharge, one ppb in a 24-hour composite sample is approximately equal to one-tenth of a pound per day.

The company's wastewater has been found to be the source of PCBs that have been detected in dangerously high levels in Lake Hartwell fish.

A wastewater sample collected Sept. 10 by the state Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) does not fit into the EPA pattern of rising PCB levels.

That sample, showing 13 ppb, was scooped at random from the water, however, and not collected during a 24-hour period.

Sangamo also conducted its own lab tests about that same time and found 2.7 to 17.6 ppb.

Lank said the increase last week probably was because of the company's use of an aerator to stir up surface water in the only lagoon currently being used.

He said the warm water pumped into the aeration lagoon was skimming the top and flowing directly into Town Creek, a branch of Twelve Mile Creek.

This was decreasing PCBs, but increasing other controlled pollutants in the final waste. The aerator was turned on to cool the water down and help settle some pollutants.

"I advised them strongly not to do it," Lank said, because the lagoon was contaminated heavily with PCBs.

Late last month EPA closed down the company's other lagoon after it was found to be contributing PCBs to the discharge instead of taking them out, as it was intended to do.

Since that time the volume of PCBs flowing into the creek steadily has increased because of other factors, Lank said.

At the same time as the latest tests, EPA technicians found that pre-treated water from the manufacturing process is being cleansed of PCBs.

The latest level is 8.31 ppb, far below that of the final wastewater. The last level found was 112.8 ppb on Sept. 3.

Lank said this shows the company has been successful in its efforts to seal off the PCB manufacturing process from contaminating the wastewater.

In related developments, the Monsanto Corp. of St. Louis has been added as a co-defendant in a $1 billion law suit charging Sangamo with polluting Lake Hartwell.

The amendment to the suit charges Monsanto, which supplies Sangamo with PCBs for use in electric capacitors, with being "strictly liable" for the health hazard caused by the discharge of the chemical.

The Anderson law firm of Anderson, Kenyon and Epps filed the suit Sept. 10 on behalf of all Lake Hartwell property owners affected by the discharge.

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