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Disposition of Tainted Oil No Easy Task

By NORMAN D. SANDLER

DES MOINES, Iowa (UPI) — Efforts of Iowa officials attempting to dispose of a large quantity of crankcase oil contaminated by the highly toxic chemical PCB were being frustrated by legal obstacles and restrictive federal guidelines.

About 10,000 gallons of PCB-tainted oil were shipped into Iowa from St. Paul, Minn., last week.

The Iowa Department of Environmental Quality said Monday it averted a "near disaster" by identifying the shipment and seeking a court injunction barring its further movement.

State officials said the chemical could have entered the food chain and endangered the health of thousands of Iowans if it had been spread on roads.

PCB, if consumed, can cause cancer or birth defects.

Officials said Monday the state faces serious obstacles in disposing an estimated 30,000 gallons of the PCB-tainted oil.

Federal regulations require that PCB be incinerated in special combustion tanks at the Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co. plant at St. Louis, the only U.S. manufacturer, or buried at a federally approved chemical landfill site at Sheffield, Ill.

Monsanto officials reportedly are cool to the idea of accepting the contaminated oil unless it can be proven it manufactured the PCB in question.

And either method of disposal would cost $100,000 — a financial burden neither the state nor the oil company involved is willing to accept.

The chemical, in a concentration 6 billion times stronger than federal drinking water standards permit, was mistaken for waste engine oil intended for use on Iowa's gravel roads and was mistakenly shipped to a Cedar Falls road oiling firm.

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