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Highly toxic chemical spill at Coors Container revealed

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Dangerous industrial chemicals that spilled from a broken electrical transformer at the Coors Container Co. in Golden June 27 caused an estimated $20,000 to $25,000 damage a Coors spokesman said Thursday.

The Coors spokesman said no measurable amounts of the highly toxic chemicals were found after the accident in nearby Clear Creek or in the metropolitan sewage system. He said no one was injured.

He said the spill was not publicly announced by Coors because "we didn't feel it warranted an announcement to the public, since the material was contained within the Coors facilities."

The spilled chemicals were polychlorinated biphenyls, known as PCBs, which are hydrocarbons derived from benzene. PCBs frequently are used in electrical equipment because of their insulating and fire resistant properties.

In the past, PCBs also have been used in plastics, lubricants, paints, adhesives, inks, asphalt, "carbonless" duplicating paper and other products. The Monsanto Corp., the only United States producer of PCBs, limited sale of the chemicals to manufacturers of electrical equipment in the early 1970s, after the danger of the substances was realized.

PCBS HAVE BEEN IN USE since 1929 and now are distributed throughout the environment. They have been linked to skin disease, liver cancer, miscarriages and birth defects in tests on laboratory animals.

The federal government has proposed stopping production of PCBs, even for use in electrical equipment, in 1980. Several years ago, the government set maximum allowed levels of PCBs in water, food and food packaging materials.

The Coors spokesman said about 150 gallons of liquid coolant, containing PCBs, spilled from a broken transformer on the roof of the Coors Container Co. building during the early afternoon of June 27. Coors Container Co. is about a mile and a half east of the Coors brewery in Golden.

"Some spilled down through the roof into the building, but it was all contained within the facility," the Coors spokesman said.

He said employes donned protective clothing and cleaned up the spilled coolant after supervisors explained to them that it contained dangerous PCBs.

"Between six and nine employes took showers afterward as a precaution," the Coors spokesman said. "Two of them thought they may have had traces of the material on their protective gear."

HE SAID THE PROTECTIVE clothing, rags used to clean up the spill, some stacks of can lids and some pipes were contaminated by the spill. All the contaminated materials, he said, will be disposed of by the General Electric Co., maker of the transformer which broke.

The contaminated materials and the mopped-up coolant will be shipped to a General Electric facility "somewhere on the east coast" and burned, according to the Coors spokesman.

PCBs can be destroyed only if they are burned at temperatures of 2,000 degrees or more.

The Colorado Water Quality Control Commission and the Denver Wastewater Quality Control Center were notified of the spill "as per normal procedures," the spokesman said.

He said tests in Clear Creek, which is near the Coors Container Co. building, and in nearby sewage facilities showed "no traces of the material" after the accident.

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