

Dioxin hazards hushed

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists from four chemical companies met at Dow Chemical Co. headquarters in 1965 to discuss possible hazards of the toxic substance dioxin, but chose not to make the information public for fear of government regulation, The New York Times reported today.

The Times said one of the scientists who attended the meeting on March 24, 1965, in Midland, Mich., disclosed that Dow officials had presented evidence at the meeting that showed the chemical caused "severe" liver damage in rabbits.

Another scientist at the meeting noted in a memorandum that officials of Dow did not want to disclose its findings about dioxin for fear the situation might "explode" and bring unwanted government regulation.

Dioxin is the name given to a group of 75 compounds called dibenzoparadioxins, composed of benzene and oxygen. Dioxin has been linked to skin disorders, birth defects and cancer in laboratory animals, but its effects on humans has been inconclusive.

On NBC's "Today" program last month, the president of Dow, Paul F. Oreffice, said, "There is absolutely no evidence of dioxin doing any damage to

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humans except for something called chloracne."

Oreffice described chloracne as a rash that tests showed "went away soon after" exposure.

"We feel the meeting (in 1965) was pretty darn straightforward and proper," Dow spokesman Donald R. Frayer told the Times on April 5. "I think on balance that the record shows we discovered a problem, sought out our competition and tried to give them information and a means to control the problem," Frayer said.

The 1965 meeting was attended by officials from Hooker Chemical, the Diamond Alkali Co. and the Hercules Powder Co., as well as eight of Dow's senior scientists, the newspaper said.

C.L. Dunn, a chemist for Hercules, wrote in a memo concerning information he had been told at the meeting that Dow said their examination of "their own and competitors' 2,4,5-T product (a herbicide) contain what they called 'surprisingly high' amounts of the toxic impurities." Dunn also wrote that test showed "severe liver" and skin damage to rabbits.

Four months after the meeting, Dr. John Frawley, chief toxicologist for Hercules, got a call from Earl Farnum, a Dow executive, calling on behalf of Dow vice president Donald Balwin, the Times said.

In a memo, Frawley said he was told by Farnum that Dow was "aware that their competitors are marketing 2,4,5-T which contains 'alarming amounts' of acenegen."

Farnum told Frawley that "if the government learns about this the whole industry will suffer."

There are many suits involving billions of dollars over the question of how much the chemical companies knew and when they knew it.

Many Vietnam veterans brought action against Dow and other companies that provided the government with Agent Orange, a defoliant used in Vietnam. One of the major components of Agent Orange is 2,4,5-T.

G-T 4/20/83 Dioxin tests on people find many abnormalities

IMPERIAL, Mo. (AP) — Area residents screened for dioxin contamination are confused and frightened after being told by health officials that almost all of them have some abnormality in their blood or urine tests.

"I was terrified," Shirley Abrahamson said Tuesday. "You start talking to all the neighbors and everybody has abnormal blood and urine. I can't believe we all have abnormalities."

"I called my wife at work and she broke into tears," said Larry Webb, one of 130 residents here to be screened after being deemed "high-risk" by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. "I thought my heart was going to stop beating."

Webb was among 112 residents out of 130 receiving in-

tensive dioxin screening who were notified in a letter from state health officials Tuesday that early lab results showed abnormalities in at least one test. In all, about 1,200 Missouri residents were screened in the CDC examinations.

Those screened all live near sites determined by the Environmental Protection Agency to contain some of the highest levels of dioxin in the state.

CDC officials ordered the intensive health exams earlier this year after the EPA found dioxin in some areas at close to 300 times the level it considers safe.

"All 112 showed some abnormality," Denny Donnell of the Missouri Division of Health said in a telephone interview from Atlanta.