Farmer Files Suit For PCB Removal

RALEIGH (AP) — A Johnston County farmer filed a federal suit Monday demanding that the state dig up more than 210 miles of roadsides contaminated with toxic PCB and asking for billions of dollars in damages.

"I don't want my children to grow up with the threat of PCB hanging over their head," T. Mitchell Langdon, 28, told reporters after filing his suit in U.S. Eastern District Court in Raleigh.

The class-action suit was filed against Gov. Jim Hunt and a long list of other state officials. Among those named was Douglas Costle, head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The suit stems from the August 1978 illegal dumping of a large amount of oil laced with polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCB, a suspected cancer-causing chemical that frequently was used in transformers.

The suit asks for $10 million in damages for Langdon and another $10 billion for all others who live along the roadside in eastern and Piedmont North Carolina where the chemicals were dumped. It asks that the state recover costs for the cleanup from those who were responsible for the dumping.

"The main purpose of the lawsuit is to get them to clean it up," said Langdon's lawyer, Hugh Joseph Beard of Charlotte.

Langdon, in a news conference, blamed Hunt for failing to have the state dig up and dispose of the tainted dirt and accused the governor of a "cover-up" of state actions in the case. Langdon declined to elaborate but contended he has conducted a six-month investigation that found "gross mismanagement in the handling of the PCB problem" by the state.

The state has treated the PCB to stabilize it on the ground but has not removed the soil despite Hunt's stated intention in 1978 to have the PCB removed.

State officials contend now they are unable to have the soil removed because of a federal court injunction stemming from local opposition to the use of a Warren County site for storage of the contaminated dirt.

Langdon denied that political motives were behind the suit. Both Langdon and Beard are Republicans and former members of the Congressional Club, a conservative political committee backing Hunt's GOP opponent, I. Beverly Lake Jr.

Beard, a delegate to the Republican National Convention, is chairman of the N.C. Conservative Union and has filed numerous suits against the state involving conservative issues. He said the PCB suit was unrelated to the conservative group.

Brent Hackney, deputy press secretary to Hunt, said the state is "acting in good faith with the PCB disposal.

"We're tied up in federal court. Otherwise we'd have it cleaned up," Hackney said.

Langdon said he operates a 600-acre farm operation that grows and packages sweet potatoes, cucumbers and tobacco.

He told reporters he has suffered from skin rashes and inflamation of the eyes, throat and ears as a result of exposure to the PCB.

Langdon also said he believed his crops within 1½ miles of the dumped chemicals had been contaminated, but he acknowledged that he sold those crops, except the ones immediately beside the toxic chemicals.

Three Jamestown, N.Y., men have pleaded guilty in federal court to charges related to the illegal dumping but have yet to be sentenced. Two other men face similar charges.

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