

Text of PCB memo

Here is the text of the letter being sent by the state to county health departments for distribution to people living near PCB spill areas:

There has been much concern recently about the criminal dumping of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) along North Carolina's roads. The purpose of this memorandum is to present the facts about this situation from a health standpoint.

What are PCBs? PCBs are a group or class of chemicals which have been used widely in industry since the early 1940's. These oily liquids have served as agents in electrical equipment in many other industrial situations.

They do not tend to break down very easily over time. Unfortunately, they have found their way into the environment down through the years so that fish, wildlife, domestic animals and many humans now carry very small amounts of PCBs in their bodies.

To complicate matters, PCBs are usually mixed with other chemicals before being used in industry. During use, there is some breakdown of these chemicals (including the PCBs) similar to the changes that occur in motor oil in an automobile with use.

What are their effects on humans? There is no immediate threat to the health of anyone living in the area of these PCB spills. In the few situations where humans have been poisoned by these chemicals, the chemicals were taken into the body either by swallowing large amounts or by getting large amounts on the skin over a period of time, as in people working in factories using PCBs to manufacture electrical equipment.

The other chemicals besides PCBs in the oily substance spilled on the roadway might cause minor temporary irritations to eyes and throat, and might

cause nausea in those smelling these chemicals immediately after the spill. These are temporary symptoms that should disappear in a day or two. They do not cause permanent ill effects.

Is it dangerous to walk where PCBs have been spilled? While there is likely no danger from occasionally walking through these oily spill areas (either barefoot or in shoes), because of the small exposure that would occur, we believe it is wise to avoid these areas unless it is absolutely necessary.

If you walk through one of these areas and note an oily substance on your feet or shoes, it should be washed off with soap and water. Contaminated clothing should not be worn until thoroughly washed.

To assure people that the risk of exposure is negligible, the Division of Health

Services is conducting a small study of PCB levels in selected individuals who have had the heaviest exposure to these spills.

Are wells, vegetable gardens, livestock and pets likely to be contaminated with PCBs? PCBs, like other oils, are only slightly soluble in water. Also, they are tightly bound to soil particles where they are deposited and thus do not move great distances in the soil quickly.

It is extremely unlikely that residues from these spills will find their way into wells. However, we are checking well water for PCBs where wells are located within just a few feet of the spills. So far results on this testing have been negative.

Livestock should not be allowed to graze on the spill areas. Some of the grass growing by the roadways is contaminated with PCBs.

Pets should also be kept out of these areas.

PCBs from these spills would be unlikely to contaminate pastures or gardens unless there was immediate run-off at the time of the spill before soaking into the ground or heavy erosion. If this has occurred, do not allow animals to graze in these areas, and do not eat vegetables from contaminated areas.

Remember:

(1) There is no immediate danger to anyone's health.

(2) Avoid, as much as possible, walking in the spill areas.

(3) If you do feel you have had PCB exposure to any part of your body, wash with soap and water as soon as possible.

(4) If you feel you have had unusual excessive exposure to PCBs, contact your county health department.

EPA team turns up first solid PCB clue

Agents of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) now have an important clue which may lead them to whoever dumped thousands of gallons of polychlorinated biphenyls along roads in North Carolina.

That's the word from Paul J. Traina, EPA's director of enforcement for its Southeast Region.

Traina today told The Raleigh Times that EPA chemists have identified the exact polychlorinated biphenyl compound which apparently was intentionally deposited along the road to circumvent a new federal law.

The polychlorinated biphenyl is Aroclor, manufactured solely by the Monsanto Chemical Corp.

EPA officials had suspected Monsanto's product was the one dumped along the roads. But Traina's remarks today represent confirmation of the first solid lead in the case.

"The key is identifying the chemical," Traina said. "These chemicals all have fingerprints."

Traina said that determining the exact nature of toxic chemicals deposited in the

Louisville, Ky., municipal sewage system gave the EPA its most important clue in solving that case — which now is in the courts.

Traina, one of six EPA officials assigned to the case, said the agency is making an inventory of all companies who use Aroclor.

After that, EPA and state law enforcement officials expect to trace the route of the chemical all the way to its disposal along North Carolina roads.

Traina was reluctant to elaborate on the efforts of law enforcement authorities to catch the culprit.

"There's the possibility of federal criminal action here," said Traina. "So I'm not going to discuss leads. Frankly, I want to bring this thing to justice."

Whoever dumped the chemicals could face prosecution under the Toxic Substances Control Act. Conviction could result in a year in prison and a \$25,000 fine for each day the law is violated.

Regulations on the disposal of polychlorinated biphenyls, which were promulgated under the act, took effect April 18.

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