Winona Shoreline To Be Examined For PCB Seepage

WINONA — Parcels of land in Winona near the Mississippi River will be checked to determine whether transormer oil dumped by a scrap dealer has seeped below the water table.

Willis Mattison, an official with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Rochester office said Thursday that the oil being routinely dumped on the land has been found to contain high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

Herman Weisman, owner of Sam Weisman and Sons scrap dealership, was ordered to stop dumping the oil and to clean up the oil-soaked earth on his property, Mattison said.

PCBs are known to cause reproductive failure and birth defects in animals and are suspected of causing cancer in laboratory rats. The industrial chemicals have been found in fish taken from Minnesota waters including the Mississippi and Lake Superior.

The cleanup effort involvs involves dumping the polluted soil into a plastic-lined dike on the Weisman property until another means of disposal can be found.

"Our problem right now is that we have dug four feet through oil-saturated soil and reached the water table," Mattison said. "If we have contamination of the water table, there is a violation of state regulation. In fact, just to dump the oil is a state violation."

Mattison said state Health Department tests showed concentrations of 14 to 16 parts per million (ppm) of PCBs in the contaminated soil.

The oil, Askerel, had been drained from electrical transformers. Weisman told the PCA he had purchased transformers, for salvage purposes only, from Northern States Power Co. in Winona and Richard Antonson, a Winona scrap dealer.

Weisman told PCA officials, Mattison said, the oil had been drained from the Antonson transformers before he got them. But he said NSP until recently had shipped transformers containing oil to him.

However, NSP District Manager Thomas Jepson said the utility had not shipped any transformers containing Askerel to any dealer since 1970, when officials becmae aware of the dangers of PCBs.

Another NSP employe said he had delivered transformers to Weisman and did not deny that they contained oil. However, Dan Pelowski said the oil may have been a type not containing PCBs.

PCA officials are continuing their inveagitation to determine the source of the transformers containing Askerel.

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