

Ceiling tiles found to shed PCBs

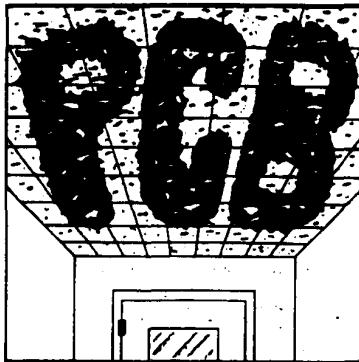
Officials at Burlington County College in Pemberton, N.J., are grappling with the first case of a new toxic contamination problem. Acoustical ceiling tiles are shedding PCBs into the air and onto the walls, floors and furnishings of their primary classroom and office building. The manufacturer of the tiles says it may have produced several million sq ft of the product.

The tiles, made by Armstrong World Industries Inc., Lancaster, Pa., were used in about a third of the two-story, 168,000-sq-ft Lewis M. Parker Center, which opened in 1970. State health officials do not consider the level of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, to pose "an immediate risk," and the building is still in use. But the cleanup may cost as much as \$2 million.

"It's a new version of PCB contamination for everybody," says Alan S. Todd, director of industrial hygiene for Stewart-Todd Associates Inc., a consultant from King of Prussia, Pa., that developed a cleanup proposal for the college.

PCBs have been found to cause skin and liver diseases in workers exposed to very high levels. They are now regulated by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, but before their health hazards became known, they were used in a number of products for flame resistance. Kevin McCormack, of EPA's exposure evaluation division, says the federal agency is investigating. He says EPA's economic technology division estimates that 6 million sq ft of tiles were manufactured and 2 million sq ft may still be in place.

Fire not cause. PCBs were discovered at Burlington by state environmental officials investigating a fire in a chemical storage vault in the building last August. But the fire is not believed to be the source of the PCBs. "We're very sure



Fire last August led to investigation of college building in New Jersey but is not believed to be the cause of the PCB contamination.

they were not released by the fire," says Dr. Kenneth D. Rosenman, assistant commissioner of the N.J. Health Dept. He says the fire was confined to one wing, the structure has a number of air handling systems and the PCB contamination was found after the fire cleanup was completed—in areas unaffected by the fire.

The danger of the contamination at the college is a matter of some dispute. Bernard S. Rosenberg, the school's vice

president for financial and administrative services, says the levels have varied with location in the building. The standard for air set by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health is 1 microgram per cu m, and readings at the college have ranged from 0.2 to 3.94. For surface concentrations, the NIOSH limit is 0.5 micrograms per sq cm, and the readings have ranged from 0.09 to 10.48. The readings are all below OSHA standards.

But it is the more stringent levels recommended by NIOSH that the state health department is using in drafting its proposal for permissible exposure limits to be included in the state's public employee occupational safety and health law, says Kathleen O'Leary, of the department. As of November 1986, the rules will also cover county and municipal workers, including the work force at Burlington County College.

Underused. According to a spokesman for Armstrong, during 1969 and 1970, three of the company's commercial ceiling tile patterns were undercoated with a product containing PCBs produced by Monsanto Corp., St. Louis. The patterns are called Sanserra, Santiagio and Embossed Design.

"While we regard the situation seriously, we don't look at this as a major problem," a company spokesman says. He claims that the company doesn't have exact numbers but could have produced "several million square feet during the two-year period." He says the company doesn't have "records showing where those ceilings were shipped." But it has been actively searching for installations by checking buildings shown in old advertisements of the product. Armstrong and New Jersey officials have checked 23 buildings so far. But the spokesman says only one—a building in Armstrong's own technical center in Pennsylvania—had detectable PCB contamination.

nation, and this was well below the levels at the college.

A Monsanto spokesman says his company met with Armstrong to discuss the situation. "We are skeptical that there is a health problem here, but we have not investigated the specific building," he says. Monsanto voluntarily stopped selling PCBs for "open uses" that could lead to human exposure in 1971.

The college is faced with the question

of who will pay for the cleanup. Both Rosenberg and Armstrong say the issue is under discussion. Rosenberg says BCC would like the manufacturer to voluntarily absorb all the costs, which he estimates at \$1 million to \$2 million. "We're not paying it," says Rosenberg, who did not rule out litigation.

Armstrong says it is still investigating "the extent to which the chemical fire contributed to the problem."

The cleanup proposal from Stewart-Todd Associates calls for the removal of the ceiling tiles containing PCBs. The space above the ceiling and all surfaces below would be vacuumed using high-efficiency filters. Carpentry in five areas of the building would also be removed. Non-PCB tiles in other areas would also be removed because they have absorbed some PCBs over the years.

By Larry Gross in Mt. Holly, N.J.

N.J. toxic cleanups slow

New Jersey is debating a new package of legislation designed to raise money to continue its toxic-waste cleanup operations while Congress continues to mull over the reauthorization of the federal Superfund program.

A package of bills that would raise about \$642 million over the next five years is now before the New Jersey senate's revenue, finance and appropriations committee. The legislation would increase the corporate business tax from 9 to 9.5% to raise between \$40 million and \$60 million for cleanups. Another bill would double the tax for the state Spill Compensation Fund, raising an additional \$15 million to \$30 million per year. And another would authorize a \$200-million bond issue for cleanups.

The package would pay for about

40% of the state's needs over the next five years, estimated at more than \$1 billion, says John W. Gaston, acting director of the waste management division of the state Dept. of Environmental Protection. DEP is counting on Superfund and payments from responsible private parties to pay for the rest.

Gaston predicts that the state will be working on 228 toxic-waste sites by 1991. New Jersey already has 99 sites listed on the Superfund National Priority List, more than any other state. Cleanup work is also being done on another 55 non-Superfund sites.

Still, some of the state's momentum in cleaning up its sites has been lost because of the inability of engineers and contractors to obtain insurance, says Marwan M. Sadat, DEP's former waste

management director. The legislature now seems close to approving a bill that would help them procure liability insurance. But progress has also been hindered by red tape involving DEP, the state attorney general and the state treasurer, he claims.

Gaston says the state is beginning to succeed in securing cleanup funds from responsible parties. DEP entered into a \$2.2-million agreement with the French firm Rhone-Poulenc Inc. to clean up contaminated soil and groundwater at an insecticide plant last week. Other accords are expected soon, says Gaston.

"This is making the funding issues a little less critical," says Sadat. "It is the insurance problems that are debilitating."

Sadat left DEP two weeks ago to start his own environmental and toxic cleanup consulting firms. So far, he has been unable to obtain liability insurance for toxic-cleanup work.

Groundwater laws urged

A new National Research Council report is providing fresh ammunition for congressional advocates of legislation to protect groundwater.

Three groundwater protection bills that have emerged in the House and Senate are broader in scope than the recently passed Safe Drinking Water Act, which calls on states to establish wellhead protection areas around public drinking water system wells.

Supporters of additional legislation "want something that will treat groundwater as a resource, as opposed to just protecting drinking water for drinking purposes," says one congressional staffer.

The National Research Council report urges just that. In preparing its report, the council surveyed groundwater protection policies in 10 states and three localities. It concluded that too often groundwater protection programs are simply cleanup operations rather than comprehensive programs designed to prevent contamination. To develop comprehensive preventive programs,

the report says states will need more help from the federal government.

Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.) says the report supports a bill he recently introduced. The bill (H.R. 3906) would require the U.S. Geological Survey to enlarge its research in several areas, including assessments of how much groundwater is contaminated or threatened and how toxic substances behave in ground and surface water. Another bill sponsored by Rep. Albert G. Bustamante (D-Texas) would establish a comprehensive state-federal regulatory program to protect groundwater. It is identical to one now in the Senate.

The NRC report recommends that the Environmental Protection Agency act "expeditiously" in setting the recommended maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) and maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) that it has already proposed to establish for some substances. If President Reagan signs the new Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA must set standards within three years for 83 of 700 contaminants found in drinking water.

Air rules would affect all Florida trash plants

All resource-recovery plants built in Florida will have to be equipped with scrubbers and baghouses to control emissions if the Florida Dept. of Environmental Regulation succeeds in passing a new regulation.

DER announced its intent after a state administrative hearing officer ruled that Broward County could build a \$187-million, 3,300-ton-per-day mass-burn plant without the air pollution control equipment. Because there are no state laws or administrative rules governing trash plant emissions, DER attempted to force the county to install the equipment in a hearing required by Florida law. The county argued that the \$20-million cost of installing a scrubber and baghouse would make the project uneconomical and have little effect on air quality (ENR 5/22 p. 15). The hearing officer agreed.

The agency will allow Broward County to build the plant without the equipment—for now. DER officials now believe they would lose an appeal of the hearing officer's ruling before Gov. Bob