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PCBs found in two area watersheds

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By DON JORDAN
H-T Environmental Writer

Poly chlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) dumped and discharged by Bloomington's Westinghouse plant have been identified in two area watersheds by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

CURTIS ROSS, DIRECTOR of EPA's Evansville district office, said in an interview Monday that the EPA found PCBs in quantities of up to 6.2 parts per billion (ppb) in leachate (polluted drainage water) draining into Richland Creek, and that PCBs were entering Clear Creek via the city sewage system.

Testing of samples gathered Jan. 21-22 also revealed PCBs at a level of 4 ppb in Sinking Creek with the source being drainage runoff from Westinghouse. EPA's results found .1 ppb of PCBs at the confluence of Leonard and Shirley Springs, which forms a tributary to Clear Creek.

PCBs were also found in leachate draining from Neal's Landfill in Owen County. Ross said those PCBs head for the West Fork of White River. The PCBs in the Richland Creek watershed are leaching from Neal's Dump on Ind. 48 in western Monroe County.

TESTING OF SAMPLES from the current Monroe County Landfill site on Anderson Road in the Bean Blossom Creek watershed showed PCBs in a ditch designed to catch leachates from the landfill.

Soil samples at all the landfill sites showed PCBs, with the current Monroe County Landfill having the highest soil concentration of PCBs at 25 parts per million (ppm).

Westinghouse manufacturing superintendent Bob Sawyer said this morning that his company received the EPA report Monday. Sawyer said a copy of the report has been sent to company officials and that Westinghouse is reviewing the EPA findings.

"We need time to evaluate the numbers," said Sawyer. He said after review of the report, the company will "decide what course of action to take, if any action is necessary."

While the EPA found high levels of PCBs at the city sewage plant, those figures have been questioned by both the EPA and city chemist Rick Peoples. Sewage plant effluent contained 19 ppb of the toxic compound with 47 ppb in raw sewage.

PEOPLES AND ROSS pointed out the samples were gathered during a recycling of the plant's digestors and the levels found would be higher than normal.

Samples of dried and wet city sewage sludge that were to have been tested by the EPA were "lost." That sludge was, until last fall, given to local farmers for use as a soil conditioner and fertilizer. Interim city utility director Mike Phillips said that practice has been halted pending something "conclusive" on the PCB situation.

The PCBs leaching from the dumps come from Westinghouse refuse disposed in area dumps until the early 1970's.

The EPA identified both Arco 1016 and 1248 in the landfills. These compounds are PCBs manufactured by Monsanto for use in "closed systems." Westinghouse uses the compounds as a dielectric insulating compound in the manufacture of capacitors.

ROSS WOULD NOT COMMENT on the possible health hazards involved with this level of PCB pollution. He said the EPA, the state and Westinghouse officials would get together and try to figure out a way to eliminate the PCBs being discharged into the city sewage system.

Ross said there might be some steps to deal with leaching at the landfills.

Ross is to forward his report to the EPA's enforcement branch for action. He said that branch would decide upon future actions.

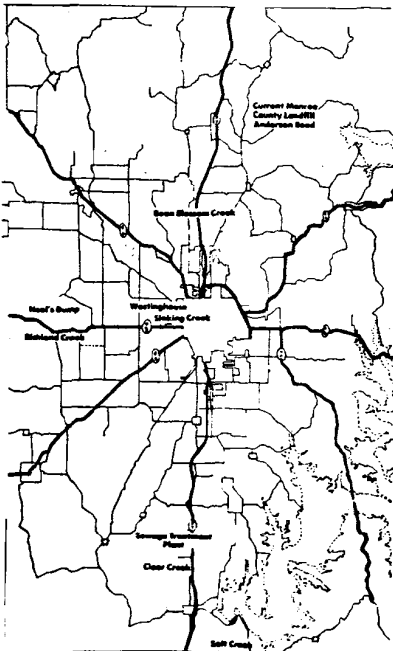
While Ross was unaware of livestock drinking water from the creeks contaminated with PCBs, he said if public concern was demonstrated there would probably be testing for PCBs in the area food chain.

The Indiana State Board of Health said they would test fish in Salt Creek earlier this year.

THE EPA IS CURRENTLY preparing another report on testing for PCBs in both Bloomington's and Bedford's drinking water. That report is to be ready in a week according to the EPA.

PCBs are so resistant to heat that they are indestructible in the natural environment. They are also stored in fatty tissues and liver tissues of animals (including fish) and accumulate (biomagnify) with time. PCBs have been passed along to offspring of fish in the Hudson River.

Human experience with PCBs is traced to Japan, where residents of a small town suffered Yusho disease from eating rice oil contaminated with the compounds. Test animals have shown reproductive disfunctions when fed small amounts of the compound.



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