CB Stored Improperly Next to Creek in Bladensburg—B1

Weather

—Sunny and cool, high 52 to
old tonight, low 28 to 38. The
of rain is near zero. Sutur-
Sunny, not as cool, high near
Yesterday—1 p.m. AQI: 53;
range: 57-48. Details, Page B2.

The Washington Post

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MONS 011083

Huge Quantities Of Deadly PCB Stored in Area

By Ronald Kessler
and Pat McCrohan
Washington Post Staff Writers

The General Services Administration, in violation of federal regulations, has been storing 2,500 gallons of the banned fluids containing PCB in leaking drums in Bladensburg, next to a creek that empties into the Anacostia and Potomac rivers, according to a GSA internal auditors' report released yesterday.

The drums are stacked in a groundlevel, paved-type area at the GSA's bulk storage facility in the Maryland suburb. During heavy rains, the storage area periodically floods, the report said.

As a Washington Post reporter and photographer arrived at the storage facility yesterday, two men operating forklifts were removing storage drums from the storage area and stacking them outside.

"They told us to get this done before you all get here," said Richard A. Meaver, foreman of the storage facility.

Asked why the drums were being removed, Meaver said his supervisor told him to "get them out and put labels on them" and to "remove all doubt."

The auditors' report said GSA's violation of minimal standards imposed by the Environmental Protection Agency for storage of the chemical creates a potential hazard to GSA employes and "the community in general."

When inhaled, PCB has been found to cause cancer in animals and to attack the immunization system of human. PCB is polychlorinated biphenyl, a chemical formerly used as a lubricant and high-temperature coolant in electrical transformers and industrial machinery. The use of PCB was banned by federal law in 1977.

No evidence has been presented to link the Bladensburg facility to any illnesses in the area. The material has been stored at Bladensburg for four years.

Matt Straus, the EPA official in charge of PCB disposal programs, said he could not determine whether the material posed any danger to residents until he has inspected the facility.

"If it's as bad as what you're saying, the [GSA] facility is in violation of EPA regulations," Straus said. "I will call up our enforcement branch, and they will get on it right away," he said.

GSA officials said they already have discussed the problems with other EPA officials, who said there

(See PCB, B3, Col. 6

Deadly PCB Stored in Bladensburg

PCB, From B1

was little they could do about it.

"Essentially, we don't know what to do with it," Straus said. However, the GSA official suggested the fire department or city could find out what "EPA could tell us what to do with it if you don't ship it across state lines. There's no way to destroy it," he said.

Leinhauser, director of GSA's building operations division, said the agency pays big companies to dispose PCB wastes in the air of the Canada. So far, he said, the levels have been below the minimum levels allowed by the EPA. He said GSA has posted signs warning that the drums contain PCB and will transfer the material into containers considered safe by the EPA "as soon as we can find some."

Howard R. Davis, GSA's director of audits, said yesterday, "it seems to me corrective action is neither simple. You can move it to a better level several miles away the world floodingh. You can do simple things to eliminate the hazard."

Davis' staff uncovered the conditions at Bladensburg during a routine review of operations there.

The GSA storage facility is a 5-story brick warehouse located in a busy industrial park. A creek runs by the corner of the warehouse where the PCB is stored, then goes underground for about 100 yards before surfacing again at the entrance of the Historic Port of Bladensburg Marina on the nearby Anacostia River.

The Anacostia runs into the Potomac about seven miles southwest of that point.

There is no evidence that any of the contaminated material has entered the creek.

"The boys spoke to me and my boss [PCB] for five years," said Meaver, the foreman. "Nobody would pay any attention to us until we got a report in the mail." Meaver said he and his employes got near the PCB storage area "as rarely as possible."

Asked what safety precautions he was told to take in moving the illegal drums yesterday, Meaver said, "None that I know of except . . . not to touch it."

Some of the employes work in a GSA furnishing shop directly above the PCB storage area. Some of them said yesterday they have been suffered by fevers and one said he has had unexplained medical problems.

Duane Cox, a carpentering instructor, supervisor foreman Harold Forsyth said, "I was crying and choking and everything else. . . . I felt nauseated. We immediately, very strong fumes."

Forsyth said his health is deteriorating and his doctor is unable to say why. Forsyth said he didn't know if PCB may be at the root of his problems. He said GSA's safety director told him there was nothing wrong and refused to test water from the stream for toxic chemicals.

While transformer coolant using PCBs is no longer made, GSA still uses 50,000 gallons of previously purchased contaminated material in transformers in federal buildings in the Washington area.

The material is taken to Bladensburg when coolant is changed or leaks.

Meaver, the facility's foreman, said the drums were being taken out to yesterday so they would be labeled as containing PCB and would then be restacked so they would not be on top of each other.

It was not clear where the drums would be taken next, and GSA officials apparently did not know. [illegible] Meaver said he was told by one of his employes that a GSA employe had [illegible] the drums would be taken to [illegible] near the creek, the auditors said.

Since PCB leaks have occurred in the past, the auditors said, there is a threat that over time [illegible] of employes working in the storage area for a GSA [illegible].

Finally, the EPA official said, agency regulations require companies and government agencies using PCB in facilities to report EPA officials and any spills of it. EPA officials they are used.

He said PCB disposal is [illegible] by burning it, but [illegible] not yet approved any incinerators capable of the task.

MONS 011084