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5-10-84

Thurs., May 10, 1984

ST LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

No PCB Contamination In Transformer Blast

Traces of the toxic chemical PCB have been found in police and fire department vehicles that responded to a transformer explosion in St. Louis on April 22, according to the city's health commissioner, William H. Hope Jr.

In addition, no PCBs were found in samples taken from the shoes and inside the homes of several police officers, Hope said Wednesday. But the results of blood tests on fire officers will not be available for a week.

Hope announced the findings Wednesday afternoon at the evening shift roll call at the Central District station in the police headquarters building at 1200 Clark Avenue. Some of the officers had responded to the explosion of a Union Electric Co. transformer under a sidewalk at 613 North Seventh Street.

About two to five gallons of

transformer oil contaminated with PCBs spewed through a sidewalk grille, causing a massive fire. The woman, Marie Hayes, of the 1400 block of North Ninth Street, was taken to Barnes Hospital, where she was scrubbed several times with soap and water and alcohol. Her clothing was destroyed.

Hope said he had determined that the police officers and firefighters had not been exposed to PCBs. But Hope said he had agreed to conduct the tests after one of the police officers, Sgt. Russell Whitener, complained last week about the possibility of exposure.

"If they perceived there was a hazard, it was an appropriate thing to do," Hope said. "We did blood tests on four officers, but a number of other officers simply felt they weren't exposed and declined."

The test results were greeted

cheerily at the roll call. But Whitener told Hope that he was upset that Union Electric had not warned police officers and firefighters immediately that PCBs were involved in the explosion.

Hope said Whitener had a legitimate concern.

"I assured them that would definitely happen from now on," he said. "We've been working with UE to identify other transformers that contain PCBs. UE has a process under way to drain the (contaminated) oil from transformers, flush the transformer and replace the oil."

PCBs were used primarily in insulating fluids and coolants in electrical equipment and machinery. Their manufacture was banned by the federal government in 1979 because they were found to cause cancer in animals.