# Government scientists join hunt for chemical dumpers

Continued from page one

"We're treating this as a criminal act," Attorney General Rufus L. Edmisten said. "We're doing crime-scene searches and we have alerted all police departments, all sheriff's departments to be on the lookout."

A.F. McRorie, director of the state Environmental Management Commission, told commission members Thursday that he believed the spills had been made by "a tanker, a truck with a pipe coming out of the back of the truck and directing it to the right of the right rear wheels of the tanker. There would have to be one man driving the truck and one man on the back controlling the pipe."

McRorie noted that the brown stain left by the chemical on highway shoulders usually ended as it approached an intersection and then resumed on the other side.

Although state environmentalist Robert A. Carter suggested Wednesday that the pollutor could have come from outside North Carolina, he told the Environmental Management Commission Thursday that "we have no indication at this time" that this was so.

Several of the chemical dumpings were located in counties near the state's northern border, but Virginia environmental officials said Thursday they had had no reports of similar dumpings north of the state line.

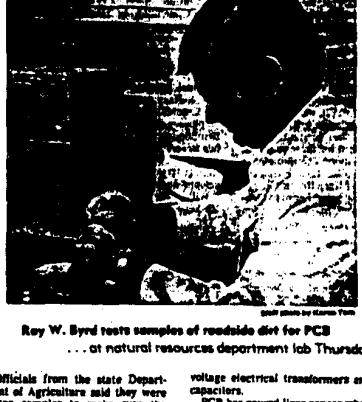
The location of one spill suggested that the driver had decided to stay within North Carolina as he drove north on one road, then turned and drove south on another. That spill lay along N.C. 96 between Oxford and the Virginia border and on a short section of N.C. 49 in Person County, which intersects N.C. 96 at the border.

Most of the spills were believed to have been made on the nights of Aug. 1 and Aug. 2, but at least one came more recently. Stuart M. George, a spokesman for the natural resources department, said a 31-mile strip of oily, noxious chemicals had been laid between Sanford and Lillington on N.C. highways 87 and 27 sometime Tuesday evening.

One of the spills lay along N.C. 58 in Wilson County, a route used by President Carter last Saturday when he drove into Wilson from the Wilson-Rocky Mount Airport. George said it had not been determined when that spill had occurred.

A confirmed PCB dumping along two roads at Fort Bragg was believed to have been made more than a month ago. Maj. Jack Horn, a Fort Bragg spokesman, said Thursday that the Army was seeking guidance from the Environmental Protection Agency.

"In the meantime," he said, "we've put up several hundred signs to warn people about the contaminated strip."



Staff photo by Warren Tolar

**Roy W. Byrd rests samples of roadside dirt for PCB . . . at natural resources department lab Thursday**

Officials from the state Department of Agriculture said they were taking samples to make sure the chemical had not gotten into nearby crops or livestock. State Human Resources Department workers were testing wells for contamination.

Dr. Martin P. Hines, the state epidemiologist, said his office was preparing information on PCB dangers to distribute to local health departments.

"There is so much concern, we want to give local health directors some real good solid information on how the different exposure situations could be handled," Hines said. "We don't want to minimize the problem, but we don't want to scare everybody to death."

Ray E. Kelling, a lab supervisor for the natural resources department, agreed that the PCB problem needed to be understood in perspective.

"Most people have in their homes chemical compounds which are more toxic than PCBs," Kelling said, offering as examples Spectracide, a garden pesticide, and benzene, a cancer-causing agent in gasoline.

"But," he added, "Spectracide breaks down, becomes neutral and non-poisonous. PCB doesn't break down."

PCB, short for polychlorinated biphenyls, is a broad term for one of several compounds that do not burn, boil or break down even at extremely high temperatures. For that reason, they are used as insulators in high-voltage electrical transformers and capacitors.

PCB has caused liver cancer when eaten by laboratory mice, and humans who have eaten large amounts of it have developed a variety of ailments. Its chief danger lies in the fact that it does not break down and cannot be flushed from animal tissue.

Besides testing chemical samples for PCB concentrations, Kelling's staff of eleven was making chemical "fingerprints" of the samples. A computerized mass spectrometer and gas chromatograph analyzed each PCB sample as a series of peaks that identified its particular chemical characteristics, much like the loops and whorls that make a human fingerprint unique.

Allen Antley, an agent in the EPA's North Carolina Enforcement Section, said Thursday that a chemical fingerprint taken from the residue in the tank truck that originally contained the chemical could provide strong evidence to link the two.

Kelling's staff, including chemists borrowed from other state agencies, was one of several groups of state employees that had put in extra hours since the chemical dumpings were reported.

"The first night we really understood what was happening, we worked 20 straight hours, until 4 a.m.," Kelling said.

*(Also contributing to this article were staff writers Ted Vaden and Rachel Brown.)*

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