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Alcan is on DEC Survey for Storing PCBs at Plant

By Sue Reinert

/ The Alcan Aluminum Co. has 1,856 pounds of liquid containing the toxic chemical PCBs on hand at its Oswego factory, it was disclosed last week.

In addition, the Armstrong Cork Co. has or is handling undisclosed substances that are on a state list of dangerous chemicals, it was learned.

The information came from a Department of Environmental survey of 5,800 industries that were suspected of handling toxic chemicals such as PCBs and mirex. The results of the survey were made public last week.

A spokesman for the DEC said Armstrong was one of 13 companies that were granted "confidential" status by the state agency because they feared that public disclosure would reveal trade secrets.

Thus, he would not say which of the 129 substances on the DEC list were stored or handled by the Fulton company.

Last year, however, it was reported that Armstrong used a substantial amount of mirex 15 to 20 years ago. Sampling in the sediments of the Oswego River has revealed high concentrations of mirex near the Armstrong outfall, and little or no mirex upstream of the outfall.

At Alcan, a spokesman said that the PCBs were in transformer oil that has been stored ther for "five or 10 years." The oil is used to replace fluid in the event of a transformer leak, he said

He said there was one such leak about one and a half years ago. The fluid and contaminated rags were sent to the Monsanto Corp. for disposal, he said.

Monsanto was the sole manufacturer of PCBs, which were used mainly as a flame retardant in transformer oils, until several years ago. When it was discovered that the chemical was contaminating fish and wildlife, the company agreed to stop making it. However, foreign companies manufacture it and it is available for import.

PCBs and mirex have both been found in concentrations above Federal limits in Lake Ontario fish. Both are highly stable chemicals that can build up to high levels. They have been related to liver disease and cancer in test animals.

The DEC survey also listed several other companies in the Oswego River watershed that reported storing or handling PCBs. Allied Chemical reported using about five gallons of PCBs per year and storing 5,330 gallons. Crucible reported an annual use of 10 gallons and storage of 1,760 gallons. Bristol-Myers reported having 1,250 gallons on hand and using none.

In Albany, Salvatore Pagano of the DEC's industrial discharge division said the 5,800 companies had been chosen by a review of their discharge permits.

Informed that Pollution Abatemenet Services, the Oswego firm that accepted toxic chemicals for disposal, was not on the list, Pagano said PAS could have been overlooked because it doesn't have a discharge permit.

Another facility that was apparently not listed was the Niagara Mohawk fire training school. Some of the oil used to start fires at the school was found last year to be contaminated with PCBs. Since then, the company has announced that the oil has been disposed of. The fire training school also did not have a discharge permit last year.

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