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Devices with deadly chemical labeled—

PCB used in BPU capacitors

Monsanto 4377

FRONT PAGE By ALAN MONTGOMERY
Staff Writer

At least 12 electrical capacitor banks on utility poles in and near McPherson contain oil treated with the deadly, man-made chemical "PCB," according to Don Gerard, general manager of the McPherson Board of Public Utilities.

PCB (polychlorinated byphenyl) is now considered such a "vicious poison" its production has been banned and the chemical is being gathered and stored with procedures likened to the handling of nuclear waste, Gerard said.

Any component "contaminated" with PCB must also eventually be removed from contact with humans and the environment, according to recent Environmental Protection Agency orders.

Each of the capacitor banks in the BPU system contains three capacitor units, each containing more than five gallons of oil, Gerard said.

More than 12 of the capacitor banks have identification plates with coded information naming them as having oil treated with concentrations of PCB, he said.

The PCB concentration in the oil is "probably in excess of 500 parts per million," he said

In compliance with recent Environmental Protection Agency orders, each of the capacitors has been marked with an additional yellow, stick-on label warning of the PCB content, he said.

The EPA has designated any oil having a PCB concentration between 50 and 500 parts per million to be gathered, sealed in barrels and transported to seven EPA-approved chemical waste landfills in the United States

Electrical components containing the PCB will be allowed to stay in use until they wear out, according to Wolfgang Brandner, chief of the EPA Toxic Section, EPA, Kansas City, Mo.

As the units are taken out of service, the oil will be cautiously drained out and the unit and oil disposed of by either transportation to an approved landfill—or by high-temperature incineration in special facilities now being built, Brandner said today.

Any oil with concentration exceeding 500 parts per million is considered too lethal to store in the seven EPA-approved chemical landfills and must be destroyed by incineration, he said.

There is no incineration facility now in operation in the United States to ship the oil to, but one incineration plant is expected to be "on-line" in Arkansas in the near future, he said.

Until that time, any high concentrations of PCB should be stored by the company owning the oil and contaminated components until an incineration facility is operational, he said

EPA regulations require the oil to be sealed in barrels and stored at protected sites complete with dikes and other precautions to guard against leakage

PCB was recently named as the chemical which killed 54 cattle on a Newton farm in August and forced quarantine of more than 200 hogs on the farm, Brandner said.

Transformer oil containing an astounding 900,000 parts per million of PCB was being used by the farmer in a livestock back-rub device which dispensed the oil, mixed with insecticide, on the animals, he said.

The back-rub device extended at an angle to a point near ground level so hogs in the lot could also have access to it, he said.

Federal and state officials are still attempting to track down the origin of the oil, which the farmer had purchased, second-hand, eight years ago at a salvage yard.

PCB production and processing was banned nationwide in 1976 by the Environmental Protection Agency after research revealed the chemical's danger to man and the environment.

In 1968 at least 1,291 persons in Japan consumed rice oil contaminated with PCBs and were afflicted with a disease the Japanese have named "Yusho," according to an EPA report.

Skin lesions and boils, said to be incurable, were among the symptoms of the Japanese victims, the report said

Studies of the Japanese victims who later died revealed an excess in the rate of cancer, particularly of the stomach and liver, the report said.

American research with test animals, including monkeys, dogs, mice, cows and hogs, show animals contaminated with small dosages of PCB show high incidence of stomach tumors, and cancer of the liver and pancreas, the report said

American workers who helped procude PCB have experienced skin disorders similar to those of the Japanese victims, the report said.

PCB was developed in 1929 by Monsanto Corporation to be added to oil, in electical transformers, capacitors and hydraulic systems exposed to extrema heat, according to an EPA document on PCB.

The PCB additive was said to increase the safety factor of the oil by making it less flamable. PCB has been in widespread use in the United States since that 1929 and has been produced by several corporations under different chemical brand names, the EPA document said.

PCB WARNING—In compliance with Environmental Protection Agency orders, the McPherson Board of Public Utilities has attached warning stickers to any of their capacitor boxes known to contain PCB-treated oil.

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