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2 potentially deadly toxins found in tower

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Building cleanup may take year

By STEVE GEIMANN

Two highly toxic chemicals were discovered in the tainted soot and ash of Binghamton's State Office Building yesterday, triggering a year-long cleanup which may cost millions, sources said last night.

The new chemicals — dibenzofuran and dibenzodioxin — are considered extremely toxic by experts, and in significant doses can cause death, a health official said.

Sources in Albany and Binghamton told *The Sun-Bulletin* last night that the cleanup considered a massive task two weeks ago now will be even more intense, lengthy and costly.

The Office of General Services, which owns the building and is in charge of the cleanup, will hold a news conference at noon today to discuss the "immediate and long-term" actions needed to clean.

State Health Commissioner Dr. David Axelrod met with the Office of General Services last night and discussed the new information.

John F. Hudacs, the deputy commissioner monitoring the cleanup, declined to discuss the future work when contacted at his home last night.

Sources stressed that based on the tests, there was no health danger to people in nearby buildings since the cleanup has been handled as a toxic chemical spill.

However, several officials said the state is now faced with an even more difficult public relations task to convince employees the building will be safe after the cleaning is completed.

Informed that two new chemicals were present, Dr. Arnold J. Schechter, Broome County health commissioner, said extra precautions must be taken to ensure contaminated material remains in the office tower and does not escape into the community.

"These are extremely toxic chemical compounds and the most potent kind," Schechter said. "We have to be much more careful."

Schechter said more vigilance will be required as the cleanup work progresses.

Scientific reports show that dibenzofuran and dibenzodioxin are frequent by-products when PCBs react with electricity arcing across malfunctioning circuits.

Fire and electrical experts believe the fire that has kept the building locked since Feb. 5 was triggered by an electrical malfunction in the main circuit board.

The 18-story office tower is polluted by soot and ash with 10 percent polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) covering every surface, including concealed sections behind false ceilings.

An official said the work now being done to remove the top layer of soot and ash will be

wrapped up and other work will cease while the state reassesses the current work.

Sources said officials believe the total cleanup of all sections of the building may include gutting the interior and destroying all furniture, although a final decision on the exact procedure has not been made.

Cleanup coordinators working to wash the top layer of soot yesterday experimented with several solvents — including Lysol, Lestoil, Seawash and a mixture of mineral oil and alcohol — to determine which cleaned best. Those solvents may still be used to clean the additional chemicals, officials said.

The new chemicals were uncovered in the most recent set of tests completed by the state health department. The exact amounts of the chemicals could not be obtained last night.

A separate set of tests showed the PCB contamination level dropped from an average 162 micrograms per square meter on work surfaces before washing and cleaning to about 11 micrograms per square meter after the washing.

Air in the tower contains 1.43 micrograms of PCBs per cubic meter — just above the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health recommendation of one microgram per cubic meter and below the federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration regulation of

100 micrograms per cubic meter. Officials have said they plan to meet the NIOSH guideline before the building is declared safe for reentry.

An unprecedented cleanup has been carried out for the past 22 days as the state works to return the building to normal, a process that has cost about \$600,000 — not including salaries for state employees reassigned to Binghamton for the work.

The discovery of the two additional chemicals could mean all the "hidden spaces" will be cleaned, a process that could take months, according to officials on the scene.

Schechter said he was also concerned that some cleaners who entered the building were not properly shielded, and he called for a thorough review of the process.

A series of tests conducted by General Electric Co. just after the mishap showed traces of the two new chemicals, although state officials decided not to act until their own tests were completed.

The new discovery will mean the displaced workers will find permanent homes in other buildings in downtown Binghamton, or at several state-owned buildings at the Psychiatric Center of the Developmental Center.

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PCBs released—

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Nirchi said the flushing points out the deficiencies that have existed in the cleanup procedure and the difficulty in communication between state agencies.

"It goes to show you there should have been a plan. . . . The significance is what it illustrates and not really the environmental impact," Nirchi said.

In another incident, Dr. Arnold J. Schecter, Broome County health commissioner, yesterday discovered that certain doors that were supposed to be secure were unlocked in the basement of Binghamton City Hall which adjoins the state building. The basement area of the government complex is supposed to be off limits to the public and the doors in question bore signs that said, "This door is not to be unlocked or blocked."

Schecter said he called Seiffert and Binghamton Mayor Alfred J. Labous about the unlocked doors.

"The doors apparently are open because of some fire rule. . . . I suggested they either post guards there or put something there to prevent people from going in there," Schecter said.

Schecter said security and safety measures need to be improved to

keep any contamination from getting out of the state building into Binghamton.

"We are dealing with one of the most deadly agents known to man (dioxin) and I clearly expect that the next years of my life will be devoted to seeing that these toxins do not get out of the building into the streets of Binghamton and Broome County. This is an unprecedented situation," Schecter said.

Nirchi said the toilets should not have been flushed before a written permit was granted by the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

"The bottom line is DEC did not grant approval to OGS (state Office of General Services), but the environmental impact is not really anything to worry about. It's unfortunate, but it shouldn't even be detectable at the treatment plant," Nirchi said.

Nirchi said environmental officials probably would have allowed the discharge eventually.

"But it would have been monitored and it wouldn't have been all at once. Now it's an after the fact judgment and we usually like to plan before the fact," Nirchi said.

PCBs in water flushed without state approval

By LOIS FECTEAU

All the toilets in the contaminated Binghamton State Office Building were flushed yesterday, releasing traces of a toxic chemical into Binghamton's sewer system in an apparent misunderstanding by state officials.

Environmental officials said last night they did not give permission for the flushing by the state Office of General Services.

Officials said the flushing should not cause any adverse environmental impact because the amounts of polychlorinated biphenyls in the toilet water are thought to be low and would be significantly diluted before getting into the Binghamton-Johnson City Joint Sewage Treatment Facilities and the Susquehanna River.

The toilet flushing was the latest mishap in the cleanup at the state building which was halted indefinitely Thursday after dioxin, the deadly component in Agent Orange, the defoliant used in Vietnam, and dibenzofuran, another toxic, were detected in the 18-story structure.

Officials said they did not know if these other chemicals were in the toilet water, but said if so they would assume the amounts to be too small to measure.

David K. Seiffert, cleanup supervisor at the state building, said he had the toilets flushed after talking with Mario M. Nirchi, senior engineer in the Binghamton office of the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

"We talked about the numbers (test samples of water from a few toilets) and he said, 'I see no problem with those. I took that to mean I could go ahead. He didn't literally say I could flush,'" said Seiffert, a state Office of General Services engineer.

Nirchi agreed he discussed the test results yesterday morning with Seiffert but said he did not give permission for flushing.

"There was no discussion about flushing the water. Why would you want to flush? Why do it now? There are so many things that have to be studied and looked at in that building, why not study that, too?"

Mario M. Nirchi

"I was just asked about the (test results). I said they appeared to look good because they were in the parts per billion range and other tests (results) from the building have been in the parts per million range. There was no discussion about flushing the water. Why would you want to flush? Why do it now? There are so many things that have to be studied and looked at in that building, why not study that, too?" Nirchi said.

When told last night that Nirchi said permission for flushing had not been granted, Seiffert said, "Well, I guess that's my first big mistake then. . . . Maybe I misunderstood exactly what he said. He didn't say, 'Go flush,' but I read what he said to mean that there'd be no problem."

Seiffert said the toilets were flushed as part of securing the building after the cleanup halt and to prevent any sanitary problems.

"To be frank, some (toilets) had been used and not flushed and I didn't want the darn thing to be left in that condition. You don't want the place to be left smelling like a zoo. I thought it a prudent move at the time," Seiffert said.

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PCB in air

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Officials have not specified just what a more intensive cleanup would involve, but the implication is the building might have to be torn apart or gutted if the PCB contamination is found in the walls.

Health officials said yesterday they are advising women of childbearing age not to enter the building until the cleanup is complete.

"We're trying to keep women of childbearing age out of the building. That needs to be prudent at this time," said Schecter, who is researching the total effects of PCBs.

Schecter said new test results by General Electric, the company that made the transformer, detected trace amounts of substances compatible with dibenzofurans in a sample from the state building. Dibenzofurans are a combustible product of PCBs and are even more toxic.

About 200 people including cleanup workers, officials, and state representatives have been in the building since the transformer exploded. Schecter said the only health problems he would expect to see from this type of exposure would be minor temporary skin irritations to head, neck, and chest. Serious health problems stem from exposure to massive doses of the chemical over a long period of time, Schecter said.

The state has hired an industrial hygienist to instruct work crews on proper procedures such as wearing protective clothing and respirators when handling material contaminated with PCBs.

As part of the safety program, officials said they will conduct spot checks of workers at unannounced intervals.

Test results by the state health department show that air levels of PCBs are decreasing in the building. The tests also



show, however, that traces of the toxic chemical remain after vacuuming which means the building also will have to be washed.

Yesterday the two transformers damaged in the fire were trucked to a General Electric plant in Tonawanda, near Buffalo. The transformers which had been cleaned on the outside will be restored and used again by the state although not in Binghamton, Seifert said.

"No, not here. It would not be in the best interest of public relations. Not here," Seifert said.

Seifert said it would cost the state \$50,000 to properly dispose of the transformers compared to \$20,000 to repair them.

The remaining PCB coolant in the transformers also will be recycled, Seifert said.

Even though the manufacture of PCB oil is against the law, Seifert said use of the

oil is not illegal and said there is still a lot of it around.

"The National Electric Code does not address PCB oil, only flammable and non-flammable oil, and PCB oil is classified as a non-flammable product," Seifert said.

Seifert said officials plan to build a bonding area in the sub-basement to store important papers and documents from the building until they can either be decontaminated or copied.

Because the cleanup is without precedent, state health department officials are still working to develop guidelines for the procedure. Officials are testing other Binghamton buildings to determine "normal" levels of PCBs.

"We will clean until someone tells us to stop," The New York state Health Department will have to certify the building in respect to PCB safety.

Again we've got a first. We're paving the way so to speak," Seifert said.

State building—

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"We're breathing low levels (of PCBs) right now, from refrigerators, fluorescent lights," Schecter said.

Schecter said samples would be taken today from the Broome County Health Department, 20 Wall St., Binghamton.

"The health department will be one of our control buildings. We also want to get some readings from a new building and from outside," Schecter said.

Schecter said health officials also would be monitoring the state building for some of the combustible products of PCBs, such as dibenzofurans, which can be even more toxic.

A courier system has been set up to run samples from Binghamton to Albany every morning, officials said.

The state health department will continue to take samples from the building as it is cleaned to assure it is decontaminated of the PCBs released in the fire.

For this reason, Seiffert said it is difficult to tell how long the cleanup will take.

"I have high hopes of being done with the basic cleaning operation Tuesday. The progress will be monitored by testing constantly," Seiffert said.

Officials do not yet know if it will be necessary to clean insides of desk drawers and files, Seiffert said.

"That's one of the things I'm hoping the health department will be able to tell me, if that kind of cleaning is necessary," Seiffert said.

When asked how one decontaminates documents, Seiffert said, "We don't know yet. That's something we have to experiment with. We're first vacuuming and then we'll test."

Health officials took blood samples yesterday from everyone who has been in the building since the transformer exploded. The samples will be frozen at Binghamton General Hospital for future testing, officials said.

Cleanup

New electrical system to take at least a year

By LOIS FECTEAU

Installation of a new electrical system at the State Office Building will take at least a year, says David K. Seiffert, who is in charge of cleanup and repair of the downtown Binghamton building.

Meanwhile, because this is the first time in the world an office building has been contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), safety standards for office buildings are lacking and the state health department must develop guidelines for the cleanup.

"This is the first time ever anywhere in the world that an office building has been polluted with PCBs. There have been cases in industry of warehouses and sheds which would be much more straightforward, but nothing like this," said Broome County Health Commissioner Dr. Arnold J. Schecter.

"I've asked the (state) health department to establish what we're shooting for so we can see where we're heading and know when we're finished. It appears we're the first ever to do this kind of cleanup," said Seiffert, who works for the state Office of General Services.

The state building has been closed since Thursday when a fire and explosion in a basement transformer blasted hundreds of gallons of PCB coolant throughout the room and contaminated other areas of the building with fumes and ash.

"The design for (the electrical system) will start very soon in Albany, but transformers are not an available item. It will take a year or more. Just ordering the equipment takes a year," said Seiffert.

Seiffert described the electrical system in the building now as "running on giant extension cords." He said the state is working to set up a temporary electrical system.

"We have a temporary transformer installed from NYSEG (New York State Electric & Gas Corp.), but more importantly we're working on the (electrical) distribution system that was ruined and has to be reconstructed," Seiffert said.

He said officials hoped to have an elevator working in the 18-story building today to facilitate the cleanup.

He said officials are learning as they go in the cleanup.

A special team from the state health department was in Binghamton yesterday to monitor the cleanup.

Schecter said officials planned to test other Binghamton buildings today to determine normal levels of PCBs.

City toxin taint rivals the worst

By LOIS FECTEAU

The amount of contamination in the Binghamton State Office Building is equal to the effects of a chemical plant explosion that has left portions of an Italian village unoccupied for five years, state health officials say.

In 1976 after the ICMESA chemical plant outside of Milan exploded releasing a cloud of chemicals into the air, more than 700 persons were evacuated from their homes in the nearby town of Seveso. Many of the homes still are contaminated and unoccupied.

"We're talking the same ballpark of contamination as Seveso, but they had people exposed. Here, the building has been exposed," said Dr. Philip R. Taylor, a state health department epidemiologist.

Taylor said that between two to 10 pounds of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzoparadioxin (TCDD) were released in Seveso.

"That's the same particular dioxin we're concerned about in Binghamton. We don't know the exact calculation of how much material was released into the building yet, but we think it's similar. That's being studied," Taylor said.

Meanwhile, Binghamton Mayor Alfred J. Libous today asked the state health department to test the air in city hall and surrounding area to see if any pollution is escaping from the state building.

"I want assurances that it's not leaking into the atmosphere and if it is leaking at what levels," Libous said.

The cleanup at the state building was halted indefinitely last week after officials learned the building

also is contaminated with dioxin and dibenzofurans in addition to the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The dioxin and dibenzofurans are combustible by-products of the PCBs.

Dioxin is one of the most potent chemicals known to man and is the deadly ingredient in Agent Orange, the defoliant used during the Vietnam War. Officials said it is a thousand times more deadly than PCBs. There is no known antidote to dioxin poisoning.

"I don't think the community realizes the magnitude of the problem here. Obviously no one wants to expose people to this. What we have to do is be extremely careful so that none of this gets out into the streets of Binghamton and Broome County," said Dr. Arnold J. Schecter, Broome County health commissioner.

Dioxin is so potent that in the days immediately after the accident in Seveso, all the cats, rabbits, dogs and other animals in the most contaminated area died. Witnesses told reporters that birds just fell from the sky in the wake of the explosion.

The extent of the pollution in Seveso was such that the Italian government sanctioned abortions for pregnant women who lived in the most heavily contaminated zone. More than 100 cases of chloracne, a serious skin disorder associated with the toxin, also were confirmed; many of the cases in children.

"There were also questions of nerve problems, neurological disorders, questions of miscarriages, spontaneous abortions," Taylor said.

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State suspends cleanup—

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"They're just keeping it secret," added Young.

The county would like the state to put its plan of action into writing, Lee said.

"The safety plan was described verbally. We'd like to see it in writing and (we'd like) communication of all the data to Dr. Schecter," Lee said.

Schecter said yesterday he had received just bits and pieces of the test results and would like complete information.

"Right now, Mike (Mario M. Nirchi of the state Department of Environmental Conservation) and I don't know anything about the PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in the building. We don't have the data," Schecter said.

For example, Nirchi said he does not know if the toilet water in the state building is safe to be discharged to the outside because environmental officials have not been able to get inside the building. Chemical waste discharges are regulated by law by the state environmental agency.

"We've told them not to use any of the toilets until we can test, and we've asked OGS to sample, but I'm having a tough time getting results," Nirchi said.

Cleanup supervisor David K. Seiffert said today some of the toilets in the state building had been used even though the environmental agency has not received the test results.

"It's obvious that we have to use some, in the locker rooms and other clean areas," said Seiffert, a state Office of General Services engineer.

The state health department today also released summations of average levels of PCBs in the building from air and wipe samples. The data included values before and after cleaning for different floors, but were not site specific.

State Health Commissioner Dr. David Axelrod has said state officials are hesitant to release site specific data because they are afraid it would needlessly worry people.

Nirchi, an environmental engineer whose office was on the eighth floor of the state building, said he will not go back into the building until he sees the specific values.

"Personally, I will not go back in until I, myself, am satisfied I want to see all the numbers. I know what the numbers mean. (Another state engineer) says that's treason, but that's a personal decision each individual will have to make themselves," Nirchi said.

New tests force halt of cleanup

By LOIS FECTEAU

The cleanup at the Binghamton State Office Building will be suspended today because of the presence of two additional toxic chemicals.

"Everything we asked for will happen. The cleanup will be suspended immediately and indefinitely. A request for a proposal will be issued to find an outside contract team to do the cleanup," said Dr. Arnold J. Schecter, Broome County health commissioner.

Schecter said Dr. Philip R. Taylor of the state health department phoned him today with confirmation that two deadly by-products of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were present in the state building in high amounts.

Schecter said 2,3,7,8 tetrachlorodibenzodioxin (TCDD) was detected at 3 parts per million and 4 parts per million by weight and that 2,3,7,8 tetrachlorodibenzofuran (TCDF) was detected at 273 parts per million and 123 parts per million per weight.

"These are big numbers and these compounds are far more toxic than PCBs. They can simply kill you by breathing," Schecter said.

The state health department tests confirm earlier findings by General Electric Co., which detected trace amounts of substances compatible with dibenzofurans and dibenzodioxins in a sample from the building.

New York state Office of General Services Commissioner John C. Egan announced the halt in the cleanup and the new findings at a noon press conference in Albany today. Egan said the building would be closed a minimum of six months.

Officials said they did not know what the cleanup now would involve.

Schecter said the cleanup at the garage area of the government complex will continue, but work on the other floors will be stopped "immediately and indefinitely" because of the new findings.

Schecter said the situation at the state building will be evaluated by a team of experts across the country, including himself.

"Certification of the building will then be by a separate team," Schecter said, adding "This is everything that we had asked for."

Broome County and environmental officials complained yesterday that they were having difficulty getting complete test results and other information from the state health department about contamination at the state building.

Officials also expressed concern about adequacy of the safety measures and long term goals of the state cleanup.

"I think they have a plan," said James E. Lee, administrative assistant to Broome County Executive S. Young.

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Dioxin-removal stymies cleanup

By STEVE GEIMANN

Binghamton's tainted State Office Building could be stripped of all its furniture as the only way to remove two deadly toxins experts believe remain in the environment forever, a top state official conceded last night.

A special panel is being formed after health officials discovered two highly toxic chemicals mixed in with the soot and ash that infiltrated the building 23 days ago.

John C. Egan, commissioner of the state Office of General Services, said a special blue-ribbon panel of experts now being assembled could recommend removing all the furniture and buying new desks, files and other equipment.

Egan said such an action remained a "remote possibility," but it has not been ruled out. "That may be the conclusion we come to," Egan said last night in a telephone interview from Albany.

State health officials discovered extremely high levels of toxic chemicals linked with Agent Orange on all floors of the building earlier this week.

The chemicals — 2,3,7,8 tetrachlorodibenzofuran and 2,3,7,8 tetrachlorodibenzodioxin —

are known to cause cancer or death in laboratory animals and significant health problems in humans exposed to high levels of the toxins. There is no minimum acceptable dose.

Health department tests showed between 3 and 4 parts per million of the dioxin compound and 124 to 273 parts per million of the dibenzofuran on the third and fourth floors.

Several experts agreed yesterday that dioxin is the most lethal man-made chemical, and very small doses injected in laboratory animals have caused death.

"It's a very toxic compound," said Dr. Beverly Moses of the Mt. Sinai research center in New York City.

Moses and other researchers said the two toxins are known to remain present in materials for a long time and rarely, if ever, decompose.

The PCBs reacted with the electricity to form the other compounds, officials said.

Officials have reported that the soot was thicker on several upper floors, although additional tests for the toxins are unlikely, officials said. A single test for the new compounds cost about \$10,000.

Officials generally refer to the chemicals as

dibenzofuran and dioxin.

Moses said levels for the two toxins in the office building reported by the state health department were considerably higher than concentrations in the deadly Agent Orange defoliant.

Agent Orange was used widely in Vietnam and now many veterans have blamed the chemical for serious health and cancer problems plaguing them and their children.

Research has shown that the two toxins reduce immunity in some young animals, affect the nervous system, the liver and reproductive system — although the tests measured effects when the chemical was injected into the animals.

One researcher said the highly toxic chemicals can have the same effects when absorbed through the skin.

Moses and other experts agreed that the two toxic compounds do not break down easily, remaining attached to the soot or other material.

The toxins can be removed as long as every bit of dirt is removed from every crack throughout the building.

Dr. Philip R. Taylor, a state epidemiologist, said more tests were being considered using

laboratory mice to see if the tainted soot is absorbed through the skin.

Under certain circumstances he said the two toxins attached to the soot might separate and not penetrate the skin — although that theory has not been tested in a laboratory.

The discovery of the new chemicals prompted state officials to stop cleaning the soot and ash from the 18-story tower.

Several workers will remain in the building today, removing some bags of contaminated paper while a crew cleans the basement garage and finishes repairs on the electric circuits, said David K. Seiffert, the state official in charge of the cleanup.

State officials spent the past two days looking around the city for possible office space, already ruling the Broome Developmental and the Binghamton Psychiatric centers as unacceptable.

Neither building has enough room for the displaced workers, officials said.

Officials are concentrating now on Columbus School on Hawley Street, about five blocks from the government plaza, but are also looking at the Marine Midland Bank building where many of the displaced are working now.



John C. Egan, commissioner of the state Office of General Services, tells a press conference yesterday that the discovery of two more toxic chemicals in the state office building has forced suspension of cleanup operations.

Office workers seek answers

By STEVE GEIMANN

New York State will restore the pay and vacation time for workers thrown out of their jobs when the State Office Building was closed earlier this month.

Meyer S. Frucher, of the Office of Employee Relations, said yesterday he supported efforts of the Civil Service Employees Association for the pay.

Frucher asked the governor's office to suspend certain rules to allow the union's members in Binghamton to regain the vacation time.

When the building was first closed, those employees unable to work were told to charge the days against their vacation time. Union officials, prompted by employee complaints, sought help from the state.

At the same time, union officials said they will monitor the cleanup of the 18-story office tower and will make their own determination of the building's safety.

"We will be satisfied when the scientific community is satisfied," said Neil E. Carlson, union safety director.

The comments came during the first union meeting convened to discuss the closing of the office building and to assess the effects on the workers. About 65 workers, about a half-dozen men, attended the session.

Carlson, who is assigned to monitor the state's compliance with the U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Act, was summoned to the

meeting to allay fears of workers, many of them women.

Several union members said after the meeting they were reassured by Carlson's assurances, but others were still concerned by rumors that personal possessions were taken from the building.

Workers said they heard that typewriters had been taken from the building and resold several pocket calculators were removed and the tasks of an elephant in the office of Senate Majority Leader Warren M. Anderson, R-Binghamton, was missing.

Union officials also told the workers to file insurance claims for their lost or damaged property.

After the meeting, several employees had mixed feelings about returning to the building.

"I think we're pretty well protected," said Lucille D. Barnhart of Conklin, an employee in the Motor Vehicle Office.

Other workers, however, said they state a sloppy cleanup procedure which allowed soot and ash to be tracked through the basement garage caused them alarm.

One man said the state lacked credibility after first saying the basement was safe and then later reporting some contamination.

"They keep on changing the rules on what the standards are," said David Staff of Johnson City, another DMV worker.

Dioxin contamination suspected weeks ago

By STEVE GEIMANN

State officials suspected lethal toxins existed in the soot and ash of Binghamton's tainted State Office Building one day after the accident, but continued cleaning to avoid panicking the public.

Health experts told the Office of General Services on Feb. 6 that the electric malfunction might produce dibenzofuran and dioxin — the most deadly man-made chemicals.

Both substances were discovered in the soot last week, prompting the state to stop the cleanup of the building closed for 26 days.

The work continued until officials knew the toxic chemicals and their concentrations, said the state's health commissioner.

While officials assess the million-dollar cleanup, officials reached agreement with the Binghamton City School District for use of the vacant Columbus School as a permanent home for some workers.

Health officials also began preparing letters on the effects of toxins which will be given to 400 people who entered the building, and state experts tested to see if chemicals at-

tached to soot are absorbed through the skin.

The unprecedented cleanup has ended while the state seeks advice from experts and prepares a plan for cleaning the building — a job likely to take a year and cost millions.

Health Commissioner Dr. David Axelrod admitted yesterday he told cleanup supervisors the polychlorinated biphenyls that infiltrated the building in the fire can turn into highly toxic chemicals when in contact with electricity.

"But there was no reason to stop as long as the safety plan was being followed," Axelrod said.

"We did suspect there were other chemicals," said John C. Egan, commissioner of General Services, owner of the building. "But until we were sure, they was no point in crying wolf."

The safety plan was repeatedly breached by janitorial crews who tracked soot and ash into City Hall and the underground garage, prompting local officials to seek a halt.

Those efforts failed when superiors in Albany rejected the recommendations, interviews with officials disclosed.

Dr. Arnold J. Schecter, county health commissioner, recommended a halt on Feb. 16, saying extensive contamination required more careful study. The environmental conservation department tried on Feb. 19, but their request for a stop was blunted by agency officials in Albany.

"We were working at cross purposes," said one official who previously felt free to speak but who last night requested anonymity.

The cleanup of soot and ash from the 18-story office tower ended Friday when crews removed loose papers thrown into plastic garbage bags. Security was tightened yesterday when the state erected large plywood barricades to prevent people from entering the contaminated basement.

Workers cleaned about 30 percent of the underground garage with steam that is filtered using a makeshift \$16,000 water treatment plant. The work is expected to continue through this week.

"Axelrod, meanwhile, said experts theorize PCBs and two toxins may not be absorbed through the skin since the carbon-based chemi-

cals are tightly bound to carbon particles.

Schecter said a printed letter is being prepared for 400 people who entered the building, explaining the possible side effects. Schecter said the 100 workers in the building continuously may be sought for skin and other tests.

Meanwhile, the search for more permanent offices ended last week when the state reached agreement with school officials to rent Columbus School on Hawley Street.

The school board is expected to approve a contract tonight. Sources said the rent is about \$3,000 a month, although final details remain unsettled.

The state signed a contract last week to relocate the attorney general's office to a professional building at 38 Riverside Drive.

Officials were attempting to move the labor department into the Federal Office Building on Henry Street and local state legislators to the Chase Manhattan Bank. The Department of Motor Vehicles will remain in the Broome County Office Building and Workmen's Compensation will stay on the 2nd floor of Marine Midland Bank.

All eyes on us

World is watching cleanup at befouled office building

By LOISE FECTEAU

The contamination at the Binghamton State Office Building is receiving worldwide attention, John C. Egan, commissioner of the state Office of General Services, said yesterday in Binghamton.

"We're writing a new book here. This is the first situation where we're faced with an office building or a building of this size that's been faced with (contamination). We're getting the attention of the world," he said.

Egan and other state officials came to Binghamton yesterday afternoon to answer questions about the state building's cleanup, which was halted last week because of the presence of two deadly toxins.

Egan said officials plan to clean and decontaminate the building with "super caution."

"This will be a landmark. We're talking about the unknown. We haven't been here before. It requires a new approach," Egan said.

Officials and the state health department will convene a panel of experts from all over the world to assess the situation and establish goals for the cleanup. The state then will accept competitive bids from private pollution-control firms.

"The criteria for the cleanup are being established now by the state health department and the Department of Environmental Conservation. We will take the firm that offers the best (plan), including the economic package," Egan said.

Cleanup operations will not resume in the building for at least two months, officials said.

"It will take about three weeks for the expert panel to convene and another three to six weeks for the bids," Egan said.

The state building has been closed since Feb. 3, when a pre-dawn electrical fire and explosion damaged a basement transformer, spreading 100 gallons of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) coolant throughout the room. The accident contaminated the entire 12-story building with toxic soot.

Last week the cleanup was halted indefinitely after officials learned the building also was contaminated with dioxin and dibenzofuran. These toxins are combustion by-products of the PCBs and are two of the most potent chemicals known to man. Dioxin is the deadly ingredient in Agent Orange, the defoliant used during the Vietnam War.

The commissioner said he believes transformers will be examined all over the world because of what happened in Binghamton.

"This type of coolant is widespread throughout the world. The Navy has 440,000 of this type of transformer, all with this type of coolant. My guess is now that the problem has come forward, tech-

nology will come forward. I believe newer insulation material will be developed. I expect we'll find the answers because of the Binghamton problem," Egan said.

Dr. Philip R. Taylor, a state health department epidemiologist, said the panel of world experts also will be asked how the state health department should monitor the cleanup.

"That is another question to be addressed. Testing is expensive and time-consuming."

Taylor said he is convinced the pollution in the state building is "a soot and contact problem, not an air problem."

The epidemiologist said the health department might allow some traces of contamination to be left in the building if the dioxin and dibenzofuran are just in the soot. To examine this, the health department will do a special three-week test.

"If this stuff is all bound up in the soot, we may not have the problem we think we have. That means once you get the soot, you get the problem. If this is true, then there's the potential for leaving small amounts, as potentially the threat for humans may not be so great," Taylor said.

Health officials admit that psychological factors as well as physical dangers will have to be evaluated before the building can be certified as safe to reoccupy.

In a related matter, Binghamton Mayor Alfred J. Libous yesterday called upon the state health department to test city hall and the surrounding area to see if any pollution is escaping from the state facility.

Taylor said the state health department will do reasonable testing, but said it is "out of the question" to do extensive dioxin and dibenzofuran sampling because of the cost and time involved.

Taylor said minute traces of dioxin probably were tracked out of the state building along with the PCBs during the initial cleanup. He said they did not present a health threat and probably were too small to measure.

"I think we can be quite confident that there is very little, if anything, getting out," Taylor said.

Meanwhile, several employees who work on the fourth floor of city hall are filing accident reports with the city because of possible exposure to the contamination.

"These will go into records in case a workman's comp should ever be filed. This is a safety factor because, down the road, the employees don't know what the effects of these chemicals might be on their bodies," said Richard J. Beam, information officer of Binghamton's Community Development Department.

Officials admit that during the initial

John C. Egan talks yesterday about world attention focusing on cleanup of the State Office Building in Binghamton. Behind him James E. Wahl, superintendent of the contaminated building.

cleanup some workers violated the safety rules and apparently trapped traces of PCBs into the fourth floor, which is being used as the cleanup headquarters.

"The people up here are concerned cause they are working here day in out. Other than those who've been in building, we're the ones if anyone's been exposed. For two weeks, they were in the facilities up here. We could see it changing and everything and it was driving us crazy. The people up here concerned and rightly so," Beam said. He said 38 people work on the 4th floor.

As they have previously, state officials defended the initial cleanup procedure during yesterday's press conference.

"In my judgment, the procedures were adequate. Perhaps we could do some things differently, but in my judgment," Egan said.

"We think the procedures we're using are very good," said David R. Sei, the state Office of General Services' chief in charge of the cleanup.

State taint is 1 million times more deadly than DDT ^{3/4}

By LOIS FECTEAU

One of the chemicals polluting the Binghamton State Office Building is a million times more deadly in laboratory testing than DDT or polychlorinated biphenyls, a chemistry professor at the State University of New York at Binghamton says.

Lawrence P. Verbit said he called Binghamton Mayor Alfred J. Libous Sunday after researching the toxicity of dioxin and suggested additional testing be done to assure the toxic chemical is not getting into the streets of Binghamton.

"I was concerned there might be a risk for people living near the building or downwind from the building," Verbit said.

Meanwhile, a panel of world experts will meet April 3 in New York City at the Sheraton-Lafayette Inn to discuss what to do about the

contaminated Binghamton building, Frances Tarlton, a state health department spokesman, said today.

The panel will include experts from all over the world in toxicology, decontamination procedures and chemistry. City, county, state and federal government representatives also will be at the meeting as will union representatives, Tarlton said. She said the meeting will be open to the public.

Tarlton said she does not know if the state health department plans to do additional testing in Binghamton City Hall or outside the 11-story state building.

Libous asked the state health department Monday to test the air in city hall and the surrounding area to see if pollution is escaping from the state building.

"I want assurances that it's not leaking into the atmosphere," Libous said.

State officials have said they will do reasonable testing but said it is "out of the question" to do extensive dioxin and dibenzofuran sampling because of the cost and time involved.

Dr. Philip R. Taylor, a state health department epidemiologist, said minute traces of dioxin probably were tracked out of the state building along with PCBs during the initial cleanup after the Feb. 5 fire. He said they did not present a health threat and probably were too small to measure.

"I think we can be quite confident that there is very little, if anything, getting out," Taylor said.

However, more than 100 lottery tickets have been stolen from a concession stand in the building, city police said today.

Officials said there is no apparent health threat from the tickets which were kept in a steel case.

Edward Mosher, of the state Office of General Services, said the theft of the tickets is thought to have occurred sometime early Monday morning. Mosher said a guard noticed that the steel lock and cable were missing from the newsstand door Monday. He said the lock had been on the door Sunday night.

Police said someone in the building is thought to have taken the tickets. The incident is under investigation.

The cleanup at the state building was halted last week after officials learned the structure also is contaminated with dioxin and dibenzofurans. These chemicals are combustion by-products of PCBs. Dioxin is the deadly ingredient in Agent Orange, the defoliant used during the Vietnam War.

Verbit said the state's reluctance to test outside the state building bothers him.

"We can test for it now. Let's test for it and

be scientific about it. Let's not guess that it is low. Let's be sure about it," Verbit said.

Taylor said he is convinced the toxins in the state building are bonded to the soot in the building and are not in the air because of the properties of the chemical. Taylor called this bonding process "carbon love." He said dioxin and the other chemicals "love" carbon and would therefore be bonded to the soot.

Without testing, authorities do not know if the people working in downtown Binghamton or living downwind from the building are at any kind of risk, Verbit said.

"I realize we've got to walk a fine line between not panicking anyone. On the other hand the toxicity of dioxin has impressed me. It is indeed one of the most toxic manmade chemicals, if not the most toxic manmade chemical," Verbit said.

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Carey pooh-poohs tower's health hazards

By STEVE GEIMANN
 Gov. Hugh L. Carey unleashed an angry tirade against unions and local health officials today in an effort to downplay dangers of toxins in the Binghamton State Office Building.

"I offer, here and now, to walk into Binghamton, to any part of that building, and swallow an entire glass of PCBs and then run a mile afterwards, all right?" Carey said.

The governor's office said Carey has no current plans to visit Binghamton.

"Look, that's a sorry situation," Carey said, gesturing in a way to show disgust. "I hate to say it, but someone went amok in the Binghamton condition."

"I'm telling you, these things become overblown," he said. "Now we have to satisfy the unions which can withhold its services until they are well satisfied."

The governor said the special blue-ribbon panel that will meet in New York on April 3 was being formed solely to "satisfy those who are going to work there is no risk."

Carey spoke only of the polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs, and did not mention deadly dioxins tetrachlorodibenzofuran or the newest toxin — tetrachlorobiphenylene found in the soot and ash that infiltrated the building after a fire one month ago today.

His offer to drink a glass of water drew laughs from reporters and cringes from the state health officials and his own staff, who hustled the governor out of the room immediately after his comments.

But his comments angered local union officials, stunned cleanup workers, alarmed health officials and prompted an Endicott radio station to invite Carey to make good on his promise.

Without mentioning his name, Carey blasted Dr. Arnold J. Schecter, the Broome County health commissioner, for distorting the dangers of the contamination.

"I'd like to meet that local health officer," Carey said.

Schecter said last night he, too, would like to meet Carey and spend a half hour explaining the situation and the potential dangers.

"Governor Carey must have a tremendous sense of humor," Schecter said. "You don't say you're going to drink PCBs unless you mean it as a joke."

"I think he's kicking off his new substance abuse campaign, showing that PCBs are better for you than alcohol," Schecter said.

Union officials predicted an angry backlash from members.

"As far as I'm concerned, he's free and welcome to come here and taste the water," said Charles J. Eynon, president of Local 002, Civil Service Employees Union. "In fact, I'll personally give it to him."

Patricia A. Cavanagh, field representative for the N.Y.S. Professional Employees Federation, was astonished by the Carey comments.

"We have been so low key," she said. "We don't want hysteria. I can't see any justification for those comments."

Assemblyman James R. Tallon Jr., D-Binghamton, chairman of the Health Committee, was present when Carey made the comment.

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"I was shocked, and I don't use that word very often," Tallon said from his Albany office. "To have the governor so flippantly made this statement is absolutely irresponsible."

Tallon said the governor undercut the work of the state health department, which has been working with local officials on the cleanup.

Carey said he was not worried that drinking the toxic substance would cause harm, although tests on laboratory animals have shown PCBs cause cancer and liver damage.

"You've got to take PCBs in quantities, steadily, over long periods of time, and probably be pregnant, which I don't intend to become," he joked. "It gets into your fatty tissue and then you get a PCB contamination."

Dr. David Axelrod, state health commissioner, later told reporters an eight-ounce glass of water containing PCBs would probably cause diarrhea.

"There's no such thing as a risk free existence, as long as we have a free press," the governor concluded.

Items from tower recalled

Broome County has recalled papers and other materials removed from the contaminated Binghamton State Office Building to prevent toxins from seeping into the city.

Papers were removed from the tower after David K. Seuffert in charge of the cleanup until Tuesday, gave in to agency officials' demands for their return.

