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Transformer Oil Contains PCB

Tests run on oil stored in electrical transformers sold for scrap metal by the city of Houma have revealed the presence of a cancer-causing agent in non-hazardous levels.

According to Chief Sanitarian of the Terrebonne Parish Health Unit Clayton Dupuis, tests conducted on oil in transformers recently sold to Vito LaRocca for scrap metal revealed low levels of the carcinogen polychlorinated-biphenyls, known as PCB.

After a city employee saw a newscast on PCB, Friday, Oct. 6, the city investigated the matter and was told the oil in transformers was not toxic. According to Safety Director Daniel Naquin, a major supplier told the city PCB is not used in transformers, but in capacitors, which are similar in appearance. There apparently was a mixup somewhere Naquin said later.

Tests were conducted after Gus Gastzke of the Department of Health and Human Resources central office inquired Monday about the city's findings. Dupuis said PCB was present at the 20 part per million level. To be hazardous, there must be 50 parts per million present.

Anyone who may have old

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transformers should arrange to get the oil tested by contacting Dupuis at the health unit or Gastzke at the HHR office. If the oil contains PCB, it should only be disposed of at approved hazardous waste disposal sites or at an approved incinerator, Dupuis said. Approved sites are located in Baton Rouge and Lake Charles and an approved incinerator is being operated by Dupont near LaPlace.

Even if PCB is not present at a hazardous level, the oil should be disposed of at approved locations because it is not biodegradable, Dupuis has learned.

The city has not yet come up with an official policy for the future disposal of surplus transformers but Naquin said the city would definitely follow Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. The city is checking with all the distributors and repairmen of transformers so it can determine which ones contain PCB. It will then be able to label these in accordance with Louisiana Power and Light guidelines.

Even before the incident the procedure for disposal was changed. Surpluses must be declared as such and put up for bid.

Dupuis explained that PCB can be fatal when it is burned because it produces chlorine gas. PCB can also cause health problems by contact with the skin.

At approved disposal sites, PCB is disposed of in a drum, placed in concrete buried between layers of clay, and encircled by a trench to test for future leakage.

Dupuis said brand names of oil containing PCB include Monsanto, askarel; General Electric, pyranol; Westinghouse, inerteen; Allis-Chalmers, chlorextol; Wagner, NoFlamol; and Kuhlman, Saf-T-Kuh.

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