

EPA To Investigate River Pollutants

By Safir Ahmed
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will begin today a major investigation of pollutants that are being discharged into the Mississippi River by eight of the largest chemical plants and two sewage-treatment plants in the Sauget area.

About 30 environmental engineers and scientists will take hundreds of samples of the discharges over the next five days in an attempt to determine whether the industries are com-

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plying with federal clean-water laws, officials said.

"We are deeply concerned about the pollutants being discharged into the Mississippi," Anne Wehnert, an environmental engineer with the agency's Region V office in Chicago, said at a press conference Monday in Collinsville.

The samples will be taken from the

discharges from the following eight companies: Monsanto Co., Midwest Rubber and Chemical Co., Cerro Copper Products, Clayton Chemical Co., Trade Waste Incineration, Big River Zinc (formerly AMAX Zinc Co.), Ethyl Petroleum Additives Inc. and Pfizer Pigments Inc. The first seven plants are in Sauget; Pfizer is in East St. Louis.

In addition, discharges from the American Bottoms sewage-treatment plant and the Sauget Physical Chemical Plant will be tested.

The samples will be tested for nitrates, nitrites, ammonia, heavy metals, arsenic, mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls, oil and grease. Analysis of the samples taken will take several weeks or perhaps months, Wehnert said.

She said the agency had planned the investigation for months, partly because of ongoing concern over the quality of the water in the Mississippi River. The investigation was not prompted by the recent study by Greenpeace, the international envi-

ronmental group, Wehnert said.

"While we are aware of the Greenpeace study, this action has been planned for quite some time," Wehnert said.

Earlier this month, Greenpeace released a report that said that 19,000 excess deaths — the highest death rate along the Mississippi River — occurred in St. Louis between 1968 and 1983.

Wehnert said the companies had been told about the investigation and had been "very cooperative."

Asked whether the warning about the investigation might prompt the companies to lower the level of pollutants in the discharges, Wehnert said: "I hope not. I have no reason to believe they will try to shut down their operations or change their discharge."

Max McCombs, superintendent of environmental affairs at Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich plant in Sauget, said the environmental agency had sent the company a letter this week in-

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Pollutants

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forming the company that it would be sampling discharges from the plant all week.

McCombs said that the company could shut down parts of its operations to improve the quality of its discharges but that it would not do so.

"Our operations are in compliance with discharge standards," McCombs said. "We have nothing to hide. We are going to cooperate to make sure the data are representative of our operations."

The Krummrich plant makes chemicals for making rubber and also makes swimming pool chemicals, including phosphorous compounds, benzene and chlorine.

Wehnert said the investigation, which is being done in conjunction with the EPA's National Enforcement Investigation Center in Denver, is focused only on the discharges from the Sauget area and does not extend to any other discharges along the Mississippi River.

She emphasized that the environmental agency has been concerned about the water in the Mississippi River for some time and pointed out that in May, the agency sued the American Bottoms sewage-treatment plant in Sauget.

The suit is pending in federal court in Alton. In it, the agency alleges that the plant discharged pollutants that were the most toxic "ever measured in Region V," which consists of Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Harry Schweich, president of Cerro Copper Products Co., said he was un-

aware that the sampling done by the agency was anything other than "routine." He said that the company had submitted plans to the agency for a pre-treatment program to clean up its effluent before it reaches Sauget's sewer plants but that it had received no response.

Dave Adams, plant manager for Ethyl Petroleum Additives Inc., said the environmental agency probably would require the company to make costly changes in its manufacturing processes to clean up its discharges.

Wehnert said the last time the agency conducted any investigation of this scope was in 1982, when it tested the discharges from Sauget's sewage plant and found that "lots and lots of organic chemicals" were being discharged into the river.

Christine Bertelson of the Post-Dispatch staff contributed information for this story.

File - Krummrich

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Monsanto to eliminate 45 positions

By WALLY SPIERS
News-Democrat

Monsanto's Krummrich plant in Sauget will eliminate 45 salaried jobs by the end of next January by offering workers a voluntary severance program.

Employees who are eligible for the plan can take special severance pay and receive placement counselling, job search and retraining assistance.

"Forty-five jobs are being eliminated," Andl Smith, a spokesman for the plant. "Whether or not 45 people voluntarily take the plan, the jobs will be eliminated."

Smith declined to reveal a list of the jobs being eliminated but said they cover a wide variety of operations at the plant.

The program is a direct result of the

company's restructuring moves of 1985, which took some products away from the Krummrich plant, said Smith.

Smith said it was general knowledge that some jobs were still in jeopardy because of plant reorganization in 1985 and she didn't think that many people in the plant were surprised by the move.

Bill Boyle, plant manager, said in a prepared release that the plant reduced hourly and salaried workers in 1985 when the plant lost several key products.

"We recognized that we would have to reduce the number of salaried employees in certain areas," he said. "These kinds of decisions are never easy. It is, however, an essential response to today's difficult business climate."

The plant has held onto some jobs by

dismantling closed production units and completing some major renovation and expansion projects, he said.

Employees with 10 or more years of service who decide to accept the voluntary severance offer will receive one year's severance pay. Employees with less than 10 years service will receive one-half of their annual salary.

Employees who are offered the program have until Dec. 16 of this year to decide. The final day of employment for most employees accepting the severance offer will be Jan. 31, 1989.

Officials said the plan isn't an early retirement program, but that employees who are eligible for the severance program and also are eligible to retire will receive their regular benefits from the retirement program and also severance pay.

"Monsanto has traditionally been very fair with their reorganizations," Smith said. "We realize we have a responsibility to the employees and their families. It's very painful for everybody."

She said the Monsanto plan is a fair one and provides as much assistance as possible to employees.

The Krummrich plant manufactures specialty chemicals, like rubber chemicals and chemicals for the company's detergent division. The chemicals it makes are mainly intermediate chemicals intended for final use in other products.

The plant employs about 850 people, Smith said. It had more than 1,000 employees before the reorganization.

Little aflatoxin found locally despite rate in Illinois, Iowa

From staff and wire reports

It may be months before it is known how much of the U.S. corn crop is contaminated with aflatoxin, a cancer-causing poison, but limited tests in Illinois and Iowa have found more than a third of corn samples with high levels, officials said.

However, farmers in the metro-east are not reporting problems with aflatoxin, local experts said Tuesday.

"I'm not saying there's none around, but we haven't received any," said Tom Kramper, grain manager for St. Clair Service Co. "Anything we get goes in the drier, which will stop it."

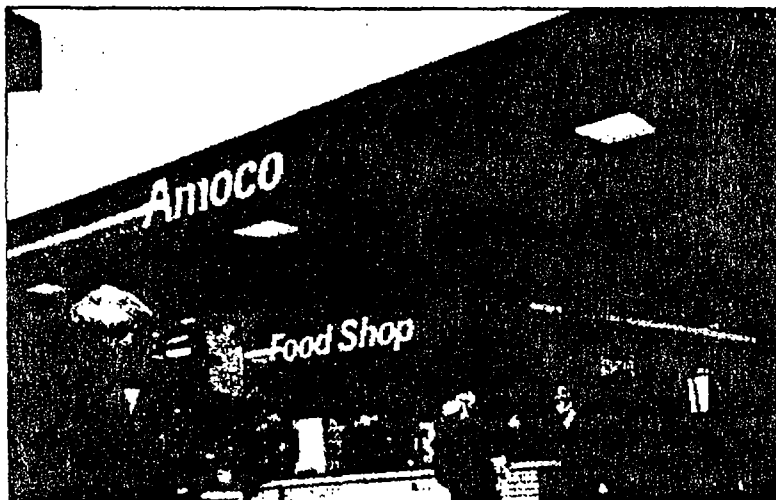
Elevators screen the corn under an ultraviolet light that will cause aflatoxin to glow. Kramper said he has only

percent of the 4.5 billion bushels estimated in this year's harvest will reach the 20-parts-per-billion aflatoxin level considered dangerous for people and animals by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Better readings of overall aflatoxin levels will not be available for several months because farmers typically store more grain than they sell at harvest time, said David Cook, assistant agricultural extension advisor in Morrison in northwest Illinois.

"So come next February when they try to sell it, we will have a second wave of aflatoxin reports," Cook said.

The contamination was caused by the drought this year, which made the corn crop more susceptible than normal





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APR 18 1988

300 Treated After Chemical Spill At Sauget

SAUGET, Ill. (AP) — An overfilled tank car apparently dumped hundreds of gallons of a farm chemical component into the air, sending some 300 people to the hospital with eye irritations and breathing difficulties, officials say.

The spill occurred at a Monsanto Company plant here about 12:15 p.m. Sunday, and forced the evacuation of hundreds of East St. Louis families as a chemical cloud drifted over the southern part of that city, just north of the plant.

"It was like smoke," said James Jackson Jr., 14, who with Anthony Bell, 16, went door-to-door to spread the news of the evacuation ordered by firefighters.

"Clouds came through our house. When we breathed it in, we started coughing."

Monsanto officials said the spill occurred when a railroad tank car being loaded with phosphorous trichloride was overfilled, dumping

from 250 to 300 gallons of chemical. It became a hydrochloric acid cloud when it hit the air.

People suffering from eye or respiratory problems were treated at St. Mary's Hospital but none was admitted, said Rose Lusk, a nursing supervisor. Among those treated were seven firefighters.

"There was nothing serious, mostly respiratory problems," added Alan Biggerstaff, head nurse in the hospital emergency room.

A Monsanto spokesman said there were no injuries at the plant.

Emergency crews sprayed the chemical cloud with water for about an hour before it dissipated. East St. Louis residents were allowed to return to their homes about 3 p.m.

Phosphorous trichloride is used as a "building block" to produce agricultural and water-treatment chemicals, Monsanto spokesman Glynn Young said. It is a volatile material that vaporizes when mixed

with the moisture in the air, forming a gaseous fog, he said.

The chemical will not cause long-term health problems, Young said, but people who inhale it can suffer short-term problems.

"It can be an irritant to the eyes and respiratory tract," he said.

He said federal and state environmental protection agencies were notified of the spill. The Illinois agency was at the plant investigating by Sunday afternoon.

Tom Powell, an emergency response specialist for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, said his preliminary investigation reached the same conclusion as Monsanto officials — that the tank car was overfilled by about 250 gallons.

Young said Monsanto would pay for the emergency treatment of those who were affected by the spill.

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APR 18 1988

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Chemical spill prompts evacuation

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