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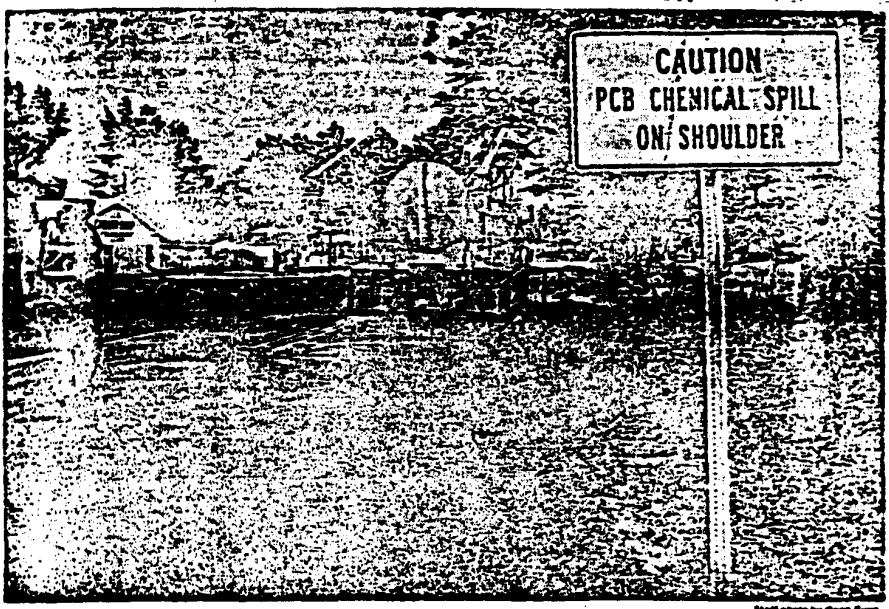

Staff photo by Gene Parr

Transportation crews spray activated charcoal along a PCB-contaminated road near Wilson

Six more chemical spills found

By STEVE ADAMS
staff writer

Six additional roadside spills, totaling about 8 miles in length and possibly containing toxic PCB, have been found in the northeastern part of the state, the state Department of Transportation reported Friday.

Dennis W. Carter, an engineer in the department's maintenance branch, said the spills probably occurred at about the same time as the more than 250 miles of spills that had already been identified as PCB.

Carter said the spills had not been tested to determine whether they contained PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), which have been linked to cancer in laboratory animals and to a variety of human ailments.

The newly reported spills are in Warren, Edgecombe, Halifax, Franklin and Nash.

A Nash County health official said, however, that the cream-colored spill there did not "seem to be like anything else that has been reported as PCB."

A spokesman for the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development added that there had also been a report of another spill in Warren County, but Carter said that spill had not been reported to DOT.

Nine State Bureau of Investigation agents have been assigned to probe the spills, which are believed to have been made deliberately to circumvent stringent regulations governing the disposal of PCBs, a Justice Department spokesman said.

The spokesman said the investigation was proceeding rapidly, but he refused to give any details.

Also Friday, the state Department of and other crops near PCB spills in Wake and Johnston counties for testing to determine whether they had been contaminated.

William Y. Cobb, director of food and drug protection, said the results of laboratory tests on the tobacco would be ready early next week. Tests on corn and cabbage should be completed in a week to 10 days, he said.

The Department of Human Resources collected blood samples from 11 Johnston County residents who live near PCB spills to determine whether they had been contaminated and whether PCBs had affected the functioning of their livers.

Blood samples were also taken for comparison from area residents who have not been exposed to the PCB spills.

"We are hopeful that both groups will be very, very low," said Martin P. Hines,

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New chemical spills found in rural areas

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state epidemiologist for the Department of Human Resources. "We may have a group near the spills with a small increase, but they'll probably all be negligible."

PCBs, used as insulators in electrical transformers until recently, are suspected of triggering 'chemical errors" in humans that have led to a variety of disorders, including acne, numbness of the limbs and liver disorders.

Hines said the spills were not believed to pose a serious health threat.

Nevertheless, the Department of Human Resources distributed 5,000 leaflets to people who live near the spills Thursday and Friday. The leaflets warned against walking through the spills and against allowing livestock and pets near the spills.

The Department of Transportation tested a modified seed and fertilizer spreader near Wilson Friday to determine whether it could be used to spray the contaminated areas with activated charcoal and an asphalt emulsion to neutralize the spills until they can be excavated.

The spills will be sprayed twice with the activated charcoal and once with asphalt. The top three inches of the spill then will be scraped off, and any leftover debris will be sucked up by special vacuum trucks.

The department hopes to begin spraying the entire 200 miles of confirmed spill sites Monday, provided the charcoal that has been ordered arrives, the spokesman said.

The job is expected to take four to six weeks and to require 157 tons of activated charcoal.

Hines, the epidemiologist, said the highway workers probably would wear protective clothing, rubber shoes and masks.

He emphasized, however, that it was not necessary for people who live near the spills to wear masks because he said the workers' exposure to the chemical will be far greater than it is for families who live near the spills.

Human Resources officials are still searching for a suitable landfill in which to dump the PCB-contaminated soil, but Marshall Staton, chief of sanitary engineering for the department, said a site would not be chosen before next week.

The site must be approved by the U.S Environmental Protection Agency.

The state has eliminated five of the 15 sites that were initially under consideration, The Associated Press reported.

The newly reported spills are located on the following roads:

- ☐ In Warren County, 0.8 miles on U.S 158 between Macon and Vaughn.
- ☐ In Edgecombe County, 1.3 miles on N.C. 43 between Pinetops and Rocky Mount and 0.2 miles on N.C. 44 one mile west of Whitakers.
- ☐ In Halifax County, 1.2 miles on unpaved State Road 1308 and 1.2 miles on unpaved State Road 1315.
- ☐ In Nash County, a spill behind Strick's truck stop on the U.S. 301 bypass near Rocky Mount.

There has also been a report of a spill on State Road 1350 in Warren County, according to a spokesman for the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development.

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