

'Orders' halted test of Dow waste water

CHICAGO (UPI) — An Environmental Protection Agency investigator said Friday the Chicago EPA office was ordered to drop waste water tests at Dow Chemical Co.'s Midland, Mich., plant that might have found dioxin.

Jon Barney, chemical engineer with the EPA's water division in Chicago, said agency officials in Chicago were prevented from doing the complete study they had set out to do.

Barney said the regional officials were allowed to place fish in the Tittabawasee River upstream and downstream from the plant and were allowed to analyze the final discharge of water from the plant.

Part of the study also called for catching fish that might be living in the tertiary pond, which is the final holding pond for plant discharge before it is released into the river. Barney said inspectors wanted to place the fish in cages for 28 days in the channel coming out of the tertiary pond or in the pond itself. The fish flesh would then be analyzed for accumulation of cancer-causing dioxin or other chemicals.

He said they were prevented from doing that part of the study when Dow objected. Shortly after that, the regional office received orders to drop it, he said.

Officials of EPA's Chicago office have told Congress that Acting EPA Administrator John Hernandez, who

resigned Friday, allowed Dow to suggest changes in a staff report that blamed the company for dioxin contamination in the Midland area. The final version of the report made no mention of Dow.

Officials at the Michigan Department of Natural Resources told The New York Times they also were forced to withdraw from a study of the discharges from the plant.

"We had problems with headquarters at every step of the way," Sandra Gardebring, former chief of the enforcement division at the regional office, told the Times. "The decision to drop the water study was made not on our own behest."

Meanwhile, DNR Director Howard Tanner said Friday Michigan is a national leader in the identification of dioxins, but he believes the toxic substance will be found nationwide.

Tanner made the comment after returning from Washington where he met with top EPA officials and U.S. Rep. Donald Albosta, D-Mich.

There, plans for a \$2.5 million research and monitoring study were discussed.

"Once again, the state of Michigan is in the forefront of toxic substance control," Tanner said.

"Dioxins and dibenzofurans are likely present in other areas of the country but haven't been detected yet."