The Charlotte Observer
CHARLOTTE, N. C.
D. 171,004 SUN. 235,722

AUG 18 1978

PAGE ONE

Plan Includes Cleanup, Medical Help

N.C. To Spend $2.5 Million On PCB Spills

By SUSAN JETTON
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RALEIGH — Gov. Jim Hunt announced Thursday a $2.5-million program to remove the polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) dumped along North Carolina roads.

The program also will provide health services for people who may have been exposed to the chemical and increase efforts to prevent further spills.

"That's what these criminals have cost the state," said Hunt.

The chemical has been dumped along 250 miles of roads in 15 Eastern North Carolina counties between Burlington and Rocky Mount. Hunt called the dumpings a "dastardly act" and doubled to $5,000 the reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.

Hunt said he would join state Attorney General Rufus Edmisten in asking the 1979 General Assembly to make such spills a felony instead of a misdemeanor. The dumping also violates federal law, which carries a maximum penalty of a $25,000 fine or one year in jail, or both.

Hunt said state officials had talked with experts at the National Institutes of Health and the Center for Disease Control and have concluded the chemicals "present no immediate health danger."

But in the next few days:

- The Transportation Department will cover the affected areas with two layers of activated charcoal to bind the PCB to the spots now contaminated.
- A layer of asphalt will be sprayed over the charcoal.
- Contaminated soil three inches deep — an estimated 52,500 tons — will be removed as soon as safe disposal sites are found and prepared.
- County health departments will deliver health warnings about exposure to PCB to every person living along the affected roads. The departments also will give blood tests to people who think they've been exposed to the chemical.
- Warning signs will be put up along the roads.
- The N.C. Highway Patrol will assign extra officers at night to guard against further spills. They'll be instructed to note any trucks that can carry the cancer-causing chemicals.

Transportation officials estimate it will cost about $800,000 to treat and remove the contaminated soil. But they say the cost could increase if disposal

See PCB Page 4A, Col. 1

PCB: A Hazard All Around Us

By KEN ALLEN
Observer Staff Writer

Polychlorinated biphenyls — PCBs — are in fluorescent light fixtures, microwave ovens, some television sets, carbonless copy paper, ink and many other things people use every day.

Why, then, all the fuss over strips of PCB less than a foot wide along about 250 miles of rural Piedmont and Eastern North Carolina roads?

"It has enough indicators of significant health hazards to be considered dangerous," says George Wirth of the Environmental Protection Agen-

See PCB Page 4A, Col. 1

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PCB Buildup Poses Hazard Across The Nation, Carolinas

Continued from Page 1A

cy's (EPA) division of toxic substances.

These things are known:

● When eaten in large quantities, the chemical causes humans to change skin color, get a strange form of acne, have eye secretions and internal ailments. In addition, children of women who ingest large quantities run a higher risk of being deformed, being slow learners and having behavior problems.

● Monkeys given PCB for six months have higher than normal rates of infertility and abortions.

● Rats, injected with high concentrations of the chemical, have developed cancers.

What isn't known is how much of the chemical humans can tolerate. But it is dangerous enough that nobody wants to find out.

Polychlorinated biphenyls had an innocent-enough beginning in 1928. Monsanto Co. researchers in St. Louis discovered these manufactured chemicals didn't burn or explode except at very high temperatures, making them ideal for use in electrical components.

"The whole United States electric parts industry developed on the basis of PCB as an alternative to mineral oil, which can burn or explode," said Dan Bishop, Monsanto director of environmental communications. Monsanto was the country's only producer of the chemical.

The first sign something was amiss came in 1966. A scientist, checking Swedish waters for traces of DDT, found PCB instead. Until then, experts had assumed the substance disappeared in the environment.

As the industry digested that, 1,000 people ate rice oil contaminated with the chemical in Japan's Yuso incident in 1968.

It is the worst incident of human PCB poisoning. The skin color changes, lesions, eye discharges and internal ailments gave scientists a dramatic case-study.

Carolinians aren't in immediate danger from contaminated soil from the recent dumpings. What threatens Carolinians is the possibility increasing amounts of the substance will get into the food chain.

"Once it gets into the environment, it moves all over the place very rapidly," said Jacqueline Warren, staff lawyer for the Washington-based Environmental Defense Fund. "It's ubiquitous."

PCB is no longer manufactured in this country (Monsanto stopped last August) and it is illegal to use it in anything but closed containers. But PCBs used and discarded years ago are still with us.

They spread in the environment, resist breaking down into less-harmful components and accumulate in animals and humans rather than being flushed out like other poisons.

EPA figures show a fish feeding in water contaminated with just a few parts per trillion of PCB can accumulate in its body many parts per million by ingesting the chemical as it continues to feed.

While that sounds insignificant, five parts per million is considered the maximum for a fish to be safely eaten.

The fish are dangerous not because they are poisonous, but because the more contaminated fish you eat, the more PCB you accumulate in your body.

So the trick is to keep the chemical out of water and out of the food chain.

In North Carolina, a pasteurizing unit malfunctioned at the East Coast Terminal in Wilmington in 1971, spewing PCBs into several thousand tons of fish meal used in chicken and hog feed.

The contamination went undetected until Holly Farms Poultry of North Wilkesboro noticed chickens fed the contaminated feed weren't developing properly. The company had to destroy 77,000 birds.

In South Carolina, the Department of Health and Environmental Control says fish caught in Lake Hartwell's Seneca River arm, above the I-85 bridge near the Georgia-South Carolina border, have PCB levels higher than EPA regulations allow, sometimes as much as 22 times the legal limit. The Sangamo Electric Co., the discharge source, stopped in 1976.

The entire Catawba-Wateree River system in South Carolina, from York County to the Atlantic Ocean, is contaminated with low levels of PCB from an unknown source.

Tests in 1975 showed two of nine fish taken from Lake Wylie near Charlotte have PCB. Tests last summer showed the chemical in all four fish tested. In all cases, the levels were below five parts per million, the EPA maximum. South Carolina will test again next week.

This increase of the chemical in fish is what worries state and national officials about the PCB intentionally dumped along North Carolina's roads.

"The biggest danger is that it will be washed down to the streams," said an EPA spokesman.