Illinois Court Bars PCB Dumping; Village Residents Call Off Protest

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WILSONVILLE, Ill., April 19—A Macoupin County Circuit Court judge has temporarily barred the dumping of hazardous wastes into the Earthline Corporation's disposal pit here. So the people of Wilsonville put aside plans for a protest demonstration that some said might have disrupted the entire town.

Judge John W. Russell yesterday barred the Earthline Corp., a wholly owned subsidiary of SCA Services, Inc., of Boston, from accepting wastes contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) for 30 days.

On two days last week, two hundred 55-gallon drums containing PCB-contaminated soil were taken to Earthline's disposal site from a mothballed disposal pit in Jefferson County used by Bliss Salvage Oil Co. at Ellisville.

PCBs are highly resistant chemicals used in transformers, carbonless duplicating paper, waterproofing chemicals and lubricants. They can cause skin and liver ailments. The Monsanto Co. of St. Louis, the only domestic manufacturer of the chemicals, plans to halt production because of the risk they pose.

Judge Russell's order is the fourth restraining order issued in the region within a week barring the movement of PCB-contaminated wastes from disposal sites operated by Bliss. The three other orders pertain to waste sites in Sauget, Ill., Frontenac, and Dittmer, Mo.

The Dittmer pit, about 50 miles southwest of St. Louis in Jefferson County, was shut down by the state about three weeks ago after officials found evidence that waste seepage had killed fish in an adjoining tributary of the Meramec River. It is the waste from that pit—up to 50,000 gallons of it—that is being trucked to the Wilsonville pit at the order of the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The restraining order was sought by the Village of Wilsonville, in the petition for relief, acting Village Board President Dean J. Filippini said that Earthline had promised the town "that they would not process toxic or hazardous materials at their plant."

Earthline's actions could "have fatal effects on all or some of the citizens of the Village of Wilsonville . . . PCB is harmful to livestock and vegetation in and about the village," the petition said.

The Rev. Casimir Glerul, pastor of the Holy Cross Catholic Church in Wilsonville, organized a meeting Sunday night that attracted 800 persons who oppose the Earthline dumping site. Wilsonville, an old mining town about 50 miles northeast of St. Louis, has a population of 700.

Sunday, Father Glerul urged his parishioners to "bring autos, trucks, combine machines and whatever tractors they have to block the street that the trucks use to enter into the dumping grounds" yesterday morning. The meeting Sunday night was a trial run.

"When so many people showed up, we decided that we would have to call off the demonstration, because there was no telling where it would end," Father Glerul said. "It's just too small a town. You get 20 cars here at one time, and you have a traffic jam."

Although the demonstration was called off, the Macoupin County sheriff sent a deputy to the Earthline pit at 4 a.m. yesterday to watch for trouble. Townspeople flocked there throughout the day to find out whether a restraining order had been issued.

"The whole town—in fact, the whole county—is upset about this," said Mrs. Gwen Molinar, a lifetime resident of Wilsonville. "They've told us so many contradictory things that we don't believe anything any more. We're just a little old mining town with a lot of old people. The main thing is to get rid of this pit."

Earthline has operated a hazardous-waste disposal pit at the site, an abandoned coal mine, since November. The site covers 130 acres at the southern edge of the town. The facility is licensed by the Environmental Protection Agency and is the repository of much of the hazardous waste generated by industries in St. Louis and central Illinois.

The company says that PCB-contaminated waste has been dumped into the pit before and that there is no danger to the town from any of the wastes in the pit.

"It would be more harmful for you to eat a whole shaker full of salt than to eat all the PCBs in this dirt," said Kenneth Hartbarger, regional director of Earthline. "The federal EPA is our customer, and we're doing this under their orders."

Earthline's pit is one of the few waste-disposal sites in the Midwest licensed to accept extremely hazardous wastes, such as PCBs.

The level of PCBs in the dirt being trucked there is between 14,000 to 18,000 parts of chemical for each 1,000,000 parts of soil, federal officials said last week. The soil has been put into steel drums, which were to have been covered with a two- to three-foot layer of clay soil.

Earthline officers say chemicals will not seep out of the landfill for at least 500 years. Ninety per cent of the pit is seepage-proof for at least 900 years, they say.

Those contentions are lost on Father Glerul. "Wilsonville has probably the highest per capita cancer rate in the country, and black lung besides," he said. "We don't even have a sanitary sewer system. If someone was drunk and threw a hand grenade into that pit, there would be no Wilsonville any more. We won't stop until we close up that pit completely."

In another development yesterday, St. Clair County Circuit Judge William P. Fleming withdrew a restraining order that had barred the Bliss Co. from moving wastes stored in four tanks at Sauget. The order had been issued last week after state officials said they suspected the wastes contained high levels of PCBs. The actual levels were low.

Restraining orders that bar Bliss from moving waste contained in a storage tank in Frontenac and the pit near Dittmer still stand.

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