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Congress to probe spill in Duwamish

SEATTLE (AP) -- A congressional subcommittee will probe the involvement of federal agencies in a toxic chemical spill last year in the Duwamish Waterway.

An aide to Sen. Warren Magnuson, D-Wash., said Tuesday the legislators want to find out whether the spill was reported properly, why the agencies traditionally responsible for spill cleanup didn't respond and whether the Environmental Protection Agency's ensuing cleanup was effective.

An electrical transformer being shipped to an Alaskan Air Force station fell on a dock while being loaded on a Navy barge on Sept. 13, 1974.

The transformer ruptured and 265 gallons of a toxic chemical known as PCB, Polychlorinated Biphenyl, leaked from the transformer into the Duwamish. The chemical is suspected as a source of cancer in both fish and mammals, such as harbor seals, that inhabit industrial waters.

The Department of Defense initially refused responsibility for the spill.

Coast Guard officials who have first responsibility for the cleanup of most spills, claimed PCB was not among the substances they are required to cleanup.

That left the job to the Environmental Protection Agency, which, after months of work and $148,000, was able to recover only 70 to 90 gallons of PCB.

The Defense Department accepted responsibility last spring for the spill and says it plans to set the Army Corps of Engineers to work to recover what can be found of the PCB.

The investigation will be made in connection with hearings opening Oct. 21 in Washington D.C. on the proposed Toxic Substances Control Act, said Magnuson's aide.

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Mrs. LaRose Disputes Solomon Stance

A prominent upstate environmentalist has taken issue with charges by Assemblyman Gerald B. Solomon that the state Department of Environmental Conservation is attempting to over dramatize pollution of the Hudson River by two area General Electric Co. plants.

Mrs. Winifred S. LaRose of Lake George, whose affiliations include membership on the State Board of Environmental Advisers, the advisory committee to the Department of Environmental Conservation and the state Environmental Planning Lobby, said that the problem of pollution by PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) is a grave one — "maybe even worse than DDT."

Mrs. LaRose attended a recent meeting of the environmental advisers in New York City and she said discussion of the PCB problem evoked expressions ranging from concern to fear.

She disputed Solomon's contention that EnCon Commissioner Ogden Reid was using the PCBs issue as a political platform, saying, "We've got a serious, serious problem."

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