

EPA

Environmental News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STURGEON, MISSOURI CHEMICAL SPILL

On Friday evening, February 9, the Monsanto Chemical Company told Environmental Protection Agency Region 7 officials that the shipment of chlorinated phenolic compounds, which was spilled in a rail car derailment in Sturgeon, Mo., on January 10, contained trace quantities of a contaminant known as dioxin (TCDD). Monsanto reported three separate measurements averaging 37 parts per billion (34, 36, and 40 p.p.b.). The company could not identify which particular forms of TCDD were present.

Acting on this information, Harry Gilmer, Region 7 on-scene coordinator, ordered a sample of the extract from the contaminated soil from the spill site sent to the University of Illinois at Champaign where highly sophisticated analytical equipment is available. With the assistance of EPA Region 7 scientists, Dr. Billy Fairless and Dr. Robert D. Kleopfer, Dr. Carter Cook of the university performed analyses which confirmed the presence of 2-3-7-8 TCDD at a level of less than 0.01 p.p.b. Gilmer's team had anticipated the possibility of dioxin con-



mination, and had both performed some analyses and had questioned Monsanto on this point.

According to medical scientists at EPA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., the new information is of concern, but presents no cause for change in cleanup procedures currently underway. Dr. Joseph Seifter, senior medical advisor to the Office of Toxic Substances, stated "The presence of dioxin in the spilled material changes the scope of our review, but does not represent cause for immediate alarm at the levels reported."

Dr. Seifter had led a team of medical and public health experts before a town meeting in Sturgeon on Thursday night, held at the request of Senator Tom Eagleton. Concern among residents is still strong, as odors from the spill linger. Seifter's group answered questions on the known and suspected effects of phenol and various chlorinated phenolic compounds, especially orthochlorophenol, which were known at that time to be present in the spilled material. They were preparing a report of recommendations for further studies in the area to be presented early this week.

Additional samples of the shipped material have been obtained from Monsanto by Region 7 officials. These are being prepared for further analysis. Steven Jellinek, EPA Assistant Administrator for Toxic Substances, will be meeting with Seifter's group on Monday to coordinate the further activities. "We intend to take all necessary steps to assure the continued identification and removal of these spilled chemicals," declared Jellinek. "EPA Headquarters will provide Region 7 with any assistance needed to complete the job and protect the health of local residents."

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Environmental Protection
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