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Illinois Residents Protest Toxic Landfill

WILSONVILLE, Ill. (AP) — Wilsonville residents, concerned that barrels upon barrels of potentially dangerous materials are being buried in a nearby landfill, are voicing their growing resentment.

Angry over a court decision allowing contamination of the burial of soil contaminated with PCBs, the villagers received more worrisome news.

Tons of chemically contaminated sludge from the sewer system of Louisville, Ky., will be trucked and buried at the Wilsonville site.

Road Commissioners—

"Why don't they bury it where they got it," said Randal Caldwell, a farmer and Dorchester Township road commissioner. He added that he would try to lower weight limits on roads leading to the landfill in an effort to stop the incoming chemically-laden trucks.

Earthline Corp., which operates the landfill, has refused to discuss what other materials lay sealed in 50-zillion steel drums buried in the 130-acre field of clay. PCBs, polychlorinated biphenyls, are chemical compounds suspected of causing a wide range of human maladies from acne to miscarriages and have been proven to cause cancer in rats.

Human Hazard—

They have caused sufficient alarm as a potential human hazard that the federal government last year banned their production and distribution by 1979.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, which licensed Earthline to dispose of "potentially dangerous" materials, said the company two weeks ago requested that its files be kept confidential on the basis that they contain "trade secrets," an EPA spokesman said.

The secrecy heightened anxiety.

Deep Well—

"It's got everyone all scared," said coal miner Allen Amos. "It doesn't scare me much because my water is from Gillespie nearby. But if I was a farmer and had a deep well around here, I'd raise Cain."

The PCB-contaminated soil comes from a spill in Jefferson County, Mo. Residents led by a Catholic priest, the Rev. Casimir Cieros, fear that these contaminants and others may seep from the drums into local streams and wells.

Sam Campagna, manager of the landfill, said, "It's unfortunate that this happened. It's a case of not reaching an understanding about what's going on, even though we made every effort to explain what we are doing here."

Trade Secrets—

He said the company requested that its files with the EPA be closed to the public because "revealing what's in the landfill could mean that some of our customers' trade secrets would be made known."

The EPA and the company contend that the site is safe. It has been operating since September 1976.

"The geological makeup of the clay is not totally impermeable but almost," said EPA spokesman James Maloney. "It is such that the waste cannot get out into water and other systems for 300 years."

"Because of the type of hard clay and amount of clay, we don't expect any problems due to tremors."

"Even if a fissure runs down the middle of the site, which is highly unlikely, this is the type of clay that reseals."

Not Safe—
Lee M. Eisel, EPA director,

feels that the Wilsonville site is one of the best-suited in the nation for the disposal of potentially dangerous materials.

"If you are going to manufacture these materials, you have to find a place to dispose of them," said Eisel. "It's as simple as that. Since all the PCBs in the nation were

originally made at Monsanto's East St. Louis (Ill.) plant, it is ironic that an Illinois community is now protesting their burial in the state."

Maloney said that the Missouri soil being buried in Wilsonville contains 2 parts per billion (ppb) of PCB contamination. According to U.S. EPA tolerances, fish,

which contain as may as 5 parts per million (ppm), are fit for human consumption.

Another EPA spokesman explained that despite the slight PCB content in the soil, "it was accidentally spilled and it's the law that it has to be disposed of this whole thing has been blown out of proportion."

Don't Flow—

"PCBs don't flow. They don't travel through the ground. They don't travel through sand. They leach on to granules," he said.

According to EPA regulations, the steel drums must be buried with at least 10 feet of clay below. Ten feet of clay also must separate the perimeter of the field from the nearest drum. When fully covered, at least 3 feet of the clay will cover the barrels, Maloney said.

In testing the feasibility of the site, the EPA also considered that parts of Southern Illinois have some history of earthquakes.

Southwest Illinois—

Wilsonville is a village of about 700 persons in southwestern Illinois.

"That was taken into consideration," Maloney said.

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PCB—and why it's raising a fuss

By CHERYL DEBES

Associated Press Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), a manmade chemical used generally in electrical equipment, is found today throughout the United States in the air, water, soil—and in people.

Last year, after tests determined it was a health hazard, Congress passed a law banning all production and distribution of PCBs by 1979.

Approximately 1.4 billion pounds of PCBs have been produced since Monsanto Industrial Chemical Co. of St. Louis began manufacturing the chemical in 1929. At present, government figures estimate that about 750 million pounds are in use in electrical equipment and some 450 million pounds exist in landfills, the air, water, soil or sediments.

Samples of human fat tissues have shown an average of one to three parts per million (ppm) of PCBs in the human population throughout the nation. And a recent study showed that many fish in the Great Lakes contain more than 3 ppm, which is the tolerance level for human consumption set by the federal Food and Drug Administration. The FDA is considering lowering the level to 2 ppm.

Karl Bremer, toxic substances coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said the chemical is "very persistent and slow to break down, if it breaks down at all."

The first indication that PCBs constituted a health hazard occurred when workers manufacturing the substance developed small bumps, sores and lesions on the skin, Bremer said.

In 1968, about 1,000 persons in Japan consumed rice oil that

accidentally had been contaminated with about 2,000 parts per million of PCBs. Reactions ranged from sores, acne lesions, blotching and skin pigmentation problems to miscarriages and stillbirths. Bremer said many of the victims still suffer from the poisoning.

Furthermore, PCBs are a suspected human carcinogen and have produced cancer in rats in studies at the Atlanta Center for Disease Control.

Bremer said that in highly industrialized areas, higher levels of PCBs generally are found in fish, animals and the environment.

He noted, though, that a national survey of PCB content in mothers' milk, conducted by the Colorado State Medical School, showed "it didn't matter much which geographical area the mother came from."

The chemical itself, depending on how much chlorine is present, can be a white, powdery solid or a liquid ranging from a clear, oily substance to a yellow, sticky material.

Its primary use is in electrical equipment, including transformers and capacitors, fluorescent lighting, mercury and sodium vapor street lights, central air-conditioning units and high-efficiency refrigerators.

It also has been used extensively in carbonless copy paper, in waterproofing paint, in hydraulic oils, in road oils and in plastics.

But in nearly every instance, acceptable substitutes for the uses of PCBs have been found, Bremer said.

A typical problem resulting from use of PCBs is illustrated by what happened when about 30,000 silos in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Kentucky were painted with a waterproof paint containing PCBs, Bremer said.

"The PCBs were transferred from the paint to the grain stored in the silos. That was fed to cows and it came out in the milk. Repainting doesn't get rid of the PCBs. We don't know what to do with those silos. The concrete is contaminated and we're having a real disposal problem."

Disposal of PCBs may become even more difficult. In Southern Illinois, citizens of tiny Wilsonville are enraged that the chemical is being hauled from the St. Louis area and deposited in a landfill near their community. They have threatened to blockade the landfill and are fighting the issue in the courts.

The federal EPA is required this month to issue final regulations on disposal and storage requirements for PCBs, Bremer said. Ultimately, PCBs should be completely broken down, but it takes special incinerators that heat to more than 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit to do that.

"The chemical incinerators presently in operation are overloaded," Bremer said. "They're also burning pesticides and other hazardous chemicals. It's a real mess."