# PCB problem may get even worse

Continued from page [illegible]

The poisonous patchwork followed a deliberate pattern: halting at towns and intersections, but often spraying right on as the driver crossed bridges.

State scientists are reconstructing a chemical footprint from the spill sites that, like a Cinderella's slipper, they hope will lead them to the source.

In North Carolina, there are at least 22 manufacturers of the kind of transformer-related equipment that uses PCB oils. That does not include utility companies and scrap yards.

"I think this is a hanging offense myself," declared one member of the N.C. Environmental Management Commission, Jerome Shiffert, echoing the outrage of tobacco farmers and dairymen from Boston to Alamance County.

But there was some feeling that stronger federal regulations on toxic waste disposal that went into effect in April may have encouraged the dumping incident in the first place.

These rules require high-temperature incineration of PCBs at an estimated cost of $1 per gallon, according to Peter Principe, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency manager.

But there's a hitch, at least temporarily.

None of the five incineration plants that have applied for federal operating licenses have been approved. And they're turning away PCBs as a precaution until their permits are granted, said EPA engineer Matthew Strauss.

There are, however, three far-flung landfills that are EPA-sanctioned for burial of specially sealed PCBs — one in Livingston, Ala. and others in Portland, Ore. and Twin Falls, Idaho.

At mid-week, O.W. Strickland, state solid waste supervisor, was contemplating how to move "a staggering pile of dirt" to Alabama, but by the weekend officials were revising downward the amount of soil they thought might be dangerously contaminated.

EPA has awarded a $1.4 million contract to M.B. Associates of San Ramon, Calif., to build a trailer-mounted incinerator that could clean up roadside PCB spills precisely like the one Strickland's department may have trouble packing off to the landfill.

Company president Robert Mainhardt said it could be another nine months, though, before M.B.'s mobile unit is ready to roll.

When functional, he said, a bulldozer would scoop PCB-contaminated dirt into a hopper at one end, thermally destroy it in an afterburn [illegible] our environment."

The association represents 3,300 companies.

A third set of regulations, still being written, would completely ban manufacture or import of PCBs including the mixtures used in capacitors, microwave ovens, fluorescent light ballasts and TVs. That rule would be effective Jan. 1.

Although state epidemiologist Martin P. Hines has insisted an immediate health threat is negligible, it is the delayed health implications of long-term buildups of PCBs that worry scientists.

One N.C. University professor, who asked not to be named, suggested that blood and urine samples be taken immediately from affected residents to establish their "base-line" PCB levels.

Weeks or months from now, he said, new samples could be taken to see if levels increased.

Prof. J.B. Weber, who teaches weed science at N.C. State, said a mixture of powdered charcoal in soapy solution could be used to to deactivate the PCBs in residential areas.



PCBs, which have caused liver cancer and prenatal nerve disorders in animal experiments, are not eliminated from the fatty tissues of humans and build up the way DDT does.

But Hines has urged rural residents to act to panic, insisting that the vomiting and headaches they have been experiencing are transient symptoms of vaporized trichlorobenzene, the heat broth for PCBs.

The immediate risk to human health, he announced in an Aug. 16 bulletin county health departments, "is negligible." Hines, a doctor of veterinary medicine, acknowledged though that high-dose or long-term effects of PCBs are frightening.

Lengthy industrial exposures have caused numbness or tingling sensations in the hands and feet, abnormal liver functions, reddened and runny eyes, nausea, tiredness and an acne-like skin rash.

Symptoms have also included digestive disturbances, jaundice, impotence, sore throats, coughing and some cases of stomach cancer, according to Hines's bulletin.

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***Local & state news/obituaries/classified ads***

# *Hunt, experts confer on PCB cleanup strategy*

By RICK NICHOLS
Staff writer

Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. held his first meeting Tuesday with state environmental and health experts attempting to plan a cleanup strategy for more than 250 miles of North Carolina roadsides contaminated by toxic PCB dumping.

The governor, who was on vacation when the dumping incidents were discovered, is expected to announce a plan of action during a Thursday noon conference.

Two more spills of unknown content were found in Nash County and east of Whiteburn in Edgecombe County Tuesday, the Highway Patrol said.

But state field investigators said they could find no trace of a spill the patrol reported Monday along N.C. 42 near Sanford.

Lacking a state emergency plan for toxic waste accidents, several agencies have been groping toward health and environmental responses — including cleanup alternatives — since the spills were discovered two weeks ago.

"There's an oil spill plan that we've been adapting," said one spokesman, "but there's a feeling now that this just won't do for future incidents."

In the interim, officials have been evolving policy daily.

State epidemiologist Martin P. Hines, for instance, insisted last week that immediate health risks of PCBs were so negligible that exposed residents could not be contacted by public health departments.

On Tuesday he announced that blood samples would be taken from residents to monitor changes in PCB levels.

Monsanto, Monsanto Chemical Corp. of St. Louis is [redacted] list is being compiled at the request of the state attorney general's office, which entered the case nearly a full week after the first spills were confirmed.

PCBs, polychlorinated biphenyls, have been used in transformer oils and a variety of household products from microwave ovens to fluorescent light ballasts.

Like DDT, they build up in the food chain and have been linked to cancer in high-dose animal experiments and to a variety of human health problems after long-term exposures.

Estimates of the cost to scrape away the top 2 inches of road shoulders along contaminated stretches of highway were prepared by the Transportation Department maintenance section Tuesday.

But if the PCB pollution is deeper than that "we'll have to drop back five yards and punt," said M.C. Adams of the department.

An undetermined amount of contaminated soil, up to 25,000 cubic yards, will have to be removed by motor graders and, possibly, borrowed vacuum-suction trucks, Adams said.

The state property office, which has no inventory of sites designated for hazardous waste disposal, has come up with a dozen possible parcels in North Carolina where the material could be buried.

Parcels in nearly every one of the 15 counties where spills have been reported are on the list, said State Property Officer J.K. Sherron.

Soil with dangerously high contamination levels would have to be trucked to a specially approved landfill in Alabama. But Jerry Parkins, a state solid waste manager, said the focus this week has been on finding suitable disposal sites within 150 miles of Raleigh.

On the lookout for the source of the PCB spills, the Highway Patrol chased down a leaking water truck that was working on a construction project at Indian Beach Tuesday. An alert motorist had reported what turned out to be a false alarm after spotting the tanker on U.S. 70 near New Bern.

MONS 001963