

PCBs spread by waste-oil use?

Federal and state environmental officials are focusing on waste-oil dealers as a major source of widespread PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) contamination in Midwest waterways.

Investigators have shown that much of the waste oil and solvents from industrial sources, such as chemical firms, electrical equipment manufacturers and power plants, are contaminated with PCBs, once widely used in transformers and electric motors. Officials have found that most waste-oil dealers fail to check whether the material they collect is contaminated before they recondition it for resale. As a result, PCB-laden oil is making its way into home and industrial furnaces and onto county roads for dust control. It is "one of the major sources in the country for water pollution," declared an Environmental Protection Agency official.

Max Wilcomb of EPA's Kansas City, Mo., office, says the waste-oil haulers are "modern-day Typhoid Mary's. They don't understand the problem and can't figure out what's happening to them."

In one major investigation, Minnesota pollution authorities are scrutinizing the activities of more than 20 waste-oil dealers in the state who they allege are distributing contaminated oil. The latest case is Hicks Oil (Pipestone, Minn.), which received oil shipments from a transformer salvager in South Dakota whose oil contained PCBs (*CW, Jan. 18, p. 18*), according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). Hicks says it was assured by the salvager that the oil contained no PCBs. The company resells oil for use on roads and as fuel to industries and schools, MPCA adds.

MPCA also says two other dealers, Mankato Oil (Mankato, Minn.) and Hy-Friedman (Minneapolis), allegedly sold PCB-laden fuel to customers, including private homes. Those firms claim they weren't aware they were selling contaminated oil.

Samples of recycled oil sold by such dealers has turned up fairly high PCB levels, says MPCA's Richard Kable, who adds that he often finds recycled oil with 100 parts per million of the contaminant. "These are local, small-time collectors . . . who get the oil themselves from old transformers," often mixing it with No. 6 fuel oil for large industrial customers, or with old drain oil for resale to others. PCB concentration in oil originally collected from junked transformers or motors is often "in

thousands of parts per million," he adds.

The burning of PCB-contaminated oil in furnaces releases the pollutants into the air, says MPCA, and they eventually wind up in ground runoff into lakes and streams. "That's one of the biggest sources" of PCB contamination in waterways, adds MPCA biologist Marvin Hora.

Because PCBs are not water-soluble, they accumulate in river sediment and are ingested by fish. PCB levels in fish sampled in Minnesota waters within the last several years have been high enough to prompt a ban on consumption of a batch of carp in Lake Pepin and a warning to those who fished parts of the Mississippi River near Minneapolis not to eat more than one meal of fish per week. Although the ban has been lifted, the consumption warning is still in effect. MPCA says PCB levels in the fish are still high.

Not Alone: Kable says his state is not the only one with such a problem. "Minnesota is probably more aware than other states," Hora adds, perhaps because thousands of gallons of PCB-laden oil shipped from the state was almost applied to roads in Iowa last year.

"The problem is widespread in Michigan, too," says EPA Regional (Chicago) Toxic Substances Coordinator Karl Bremser, although state officials try to track waste-oil haulers. The burning of contaminated oil is probably responsible for PCB pollution in Wisconsin, where EPA analyses of snow samples from golf courses in nonindustrial areas revealed PCB residues, he adds.

When oil that contained numerous hazardous substances, including PCBs, seeped from an illegal disposal site into a stream at Dittmer, Mo., last April, state and federal officials traced the source to waste collector Raymond Bliss. EPA initiated a \$500,000 cleanup, averting pollution of a nearby scenic river.

Harry Gilmer of EPA's regional office in Kansas City said the dumping incident involved extremely toxic wastes. At certain spots around the disposal site, he said, PCB concentrations in the ground reached 4%. The origin of most of the wastes was unknown, Gilmer said, although EPA traced the presence of bromophenylchlorophenyl ether to Monsanto. The company says it gave Bliss some wastes, although since the mid-1960s it has had a policy of tracing its wastes to assure they are disposed of properly.

EPA says identifying the source of

contaminants in waste oil, and even of the wastes themselves, is very difficult. Collectors receive oil from filling stations, truck fleets, junkyards, transformer salvagers, and power plants in addition to "the backdoors of industry," as one official calls it. EPA's Bremser contends that many waste haulers are paid by companies to cart away their wastes. No questions are asked and "they just want to get rid of the stuff," he adds. On the other hand, Walt Kovalick of EPA's Hazardous Waste Disposal section in Washington, D.C., says, "Some companies are so concerned about their wastes that they send inspectors out to watch where the wastes go."

EPA says the new Resource Conservation and Recovery Act will go a long way toward controlling improper oil recycling. Under that law, waste receivers will need permits to operate and will have to prove to EPA that they are disposing of wastes legally. In addition, waste generators will have to test their wastes and identify the chemical components. Says EPA's Wilcomb of the pending law: "We still don't have teeth, but we're gettin' em."

Offers for coke unit

Allied Chemical is weighing at least three proposals to take over its 240,000 tons/year, fire-damaged Sarnel-Solvay Division coke plant at Tonawanda, N.Y. Allied, which had been trying to sell the coke unit before the fire, decided earlier this month to shut down operations permanently because it estimated that repairs and rehabilitation would cost more than \$8 million (*CW, Jan. 18, p. 18*). Since the fire, Allied has lowered its asking price by an undisclosed amount.

One bidder is J.D. Crane, who is leaving his job as vice-president of Donner-Hanna Coke Corp. in Buffalo to form Tonawanda Coke Corp. and to buy the coke plant. Crane began organizing the company after his attempt to get Donner-Hanna to buy the plant failed last year. Crane says he would need co-operation from several state agencies to get the plant back into operation, and that this must be done no later than the end of January.

The coke-oven battery, he says, can be kept idle-hot for only a limited time. Main fire damage was to pollution control and tar storage facilities; the 65 coke ovens were not seriously affected.

Allied says that one of the potential purchasers inspected the plant recently. The company adds that a plant operated by its plastics division on a 135-acre complex adjacent to the coke unit will be unaffected by the closing of the coke operation.

top of the news

Pilotage costs rising

Pilotage costs in the Houston Ship Channel are expected to increase 20-25% as a result of a new rate structure approved last week by the Port of Houston Commission.

The new rates, however, are considered unsatisfactory by both the pilots and shipowner representatives. Further work stoppages are considered possible. Spokesmen for pilots and operators say it will take several days to work out the exact impact of the proposed new rate structure, which is retroactive to Jan. 1.

Earlier this month the majority of the pilots licensed to work in the ship channel staged a two-day "sickout" in a successful effort to force the Port Commission to vote for a wage hike.

Claiming that the new pilotage rate increases are "about half of what we asked for," Captain Jack Niday, presiding officer of the Pilots' Assn., says that another sickout action is "in the thinking stage."

The earlier work stoppage tied up shipping in the channel for about three days and threatened to disrupt the unloading of crude and loading of products from several of the country's largest refineries and petrochemical plants.

The full impact of the new pilotage rates is disputed. Wiley George, president of the West Gulf Maritime Assn., which represents ship owners and operators, estimates that under the new structure, pilots' annual earnings would be between \$72,000 and \$75,000.

"They're lying in their teeth," says Captain Niday of this estimate by the ship owners group. "They don't know what I make," he says, and adds that he isn't telling.

Worried about Kepone

A member of Virginia's Kepone task force says deposits of the insecticide now in the James River would be swept into the Chesapeake Bay if a major storm occurred.

And an Environmental Protection Agency official says that ridding the river of Kepone contamination would be expensive—if it is at all possible.

The state's task force was disbanded earlier this month by Governor Mills E. Godwin, Jr., whose term is expiring. But an EPA task force is expected to release an interim report on the Kepone disposal problem about Feb. 1.

Robert Huggitt, head of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's ecology and

pollution department, says: "We are afraid that a major storm on the scale of Hurricane Agnes or worse could push the stuff into the bay. The prospect is frightening."

Tudor Davies, a scientist with EPA, says the crux of the problem lies in determining how much Kepone could escape from the river into the bay. If the risk is small, he adds, it might be better to leave the pollutant in the river.

Davies estimates that it would cost more than \$35 million just to contain Kepone deposits on the bottom of Bailey's Creek, which covers 1,000 acres. The Kepone-polluted area in the James River covers about 2,000 acres.

If the EPA report concludes a major storm would shift the Kepone to the bay, Davies says, there would be no other alternative but to try dredging the river—a project that would also cost "millions." Davies points out that scientists are very apprehensive about such a prospect. He says, "I'm very scared about these deliberations. We are right on the fringe of science. We are putting our scientific reputations on the line."

Pushing SBA loans

Small businesses have shown limited interest in a federal program to fully guarantee tax-exempt bonds to finance mandatory installation of pollution control equipment. So the Environmental Protection Agency has decided to begin a campaign to promote the use of such loans. EPA is about to mail 500,000 notices announcing 10 seminars—one in each of its regions—that will explain the bond program, as well as other governmental financial assistance programs for pollution control.

Congress authorized the Small Business Administration to provide such bond guarantees in June, 1976, but so far bonds under the program have been issued only in California and Illinois. SBA says that, in California, only seven businesses have taken advantage of the bonds, while, in Illinois, only five.

Originally, the government estimated that as much as \$3 billion of the bonds could be sold annually. But, says SBA, nationwide potential is only \$100 million/year.

"EPA is upset that we're not promoting the program," an SBA official says. But he asserts that SBA is meeting the demand where it exists. Essentially, he says, there are not many small businesses that are looking for pollution financing. He maintains that these businesses are not going to put in controls until EPA threatens to close them.



DU PONT'S GEE will become president of International Paper, effective April 1.

Gee to head IP

After 30 years at Du Pont, Edwin A. Gee will retire as senior vice-president and director of the company on Mar. 31, to assume the position of president of International Paper. The IP post has been vacant since Judson Hannigan resigned two years ago.

In his role as industry representative on the National Commission on Water Quality, Gee championed the cause of a delay in implementation of the 1983 best available technology (BAT) standards that were scheduled in the Water Pollution Control Act. NCWQ recommended this midcourse correction to Congress on the basis of measured water-quality improvements made by some 90% of industrial plants meeting the 1977 standards.

And in passing the new amendments to the act last year (CW, Nov. 23, 1977, p. 15) Congress allowed for the delays by including a test of "reasonableness" before BAT standards could be enforced. Many officials have given Gee credit for bringing about what he calls a "reasonable compromise."

Gee, 58, became a member of Du Pont's board in 1969 and was made a vice-president and member of the executive committee in 1970. He was appointed senior vice-president in 1972. Gee joined the company's titanium development venture in 1948 after receiving his Ph.D. in chemical engineering from the University of Maryland.

In 1963 he became director in charge of new ventures and was named general manager of the company's Photo Products Dept. in 1968.