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250 Miles Affected

PCB Spurs Excavation

RALEIGH (AP) — North Carolina will dig up more than 250 miles of rural roadside contaminated by a chemical containing toxic PCBs, at a cost estimated at up to $2.5 million.

The excavation and a search for a suitable site to permanently deposit the estimated 52,000 tons of tainted grass and soil were announced Thursday by Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. The spills have occurred in 15 eastern and Piedmont counties this month.

Hunt said that the spills were a "dastardly act" and said county health officials will hand-deliver printed notices on the dangers of prolonged exposure to PCB, polychlorinated biphenyls, to all residents of contaminated areas.

Signs will go up around all affected areas warning people to stay off the damaged soil until it is removed. But Hunt also repeated that health officials don't think that the toxic material, dumped in violation of strict federal regulations on hazardous chemicals, poses an immediate medical threat.

"We do not, of course, know the long-term effects of PCBs on humans. That is why we must remove this material to protected and isolated sites," Hunt said.

"Other chemicals in the PCB spills have caused nausea and dizziness in some people. People should avoid walking in the spills or otherwise coming in contact with it. If they are exposed, they should wash with soap and water. If they feel they have had excessive exposures, they should contact their county health department [illegible]."

The SBI is continuing its search for those who dumped the substance along the roads, most of them secondary highways. Hunt said that the FBI may be called in on grounds that federal laws have been violated, if the SBI decides that it needs help.

A state reward for information leading to conviction was doubled to $5,000, and Hunt said that extra highway patrolmen would be assigned to roads at night to watch for further spills.

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Excavation Planned

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Agency officials have offered to make infra-red aerial photographs of spill areas to look for damage to foliage.

How the cleanup will be paid for is unsettled. Hunt said that he would find the money somewhere in the state budget. He is seeking federal disaster relief, although he said he had little hope of getting it.

If caught and convicted, those responsible could be forced to pay some or all of the costs.

The cleanup could take as long as two weeks, Hunt said. Highway workers first will apply layers of an activated charcoal solution and emulsified asphalt to stabilize the spill before using road graders to scrape up the ground.

The PCB has been traced to a type manufactured in the late 1960s by Monsanto Chemical Corp. for use in electric transformers and capacitors. Paul J. Traina, enforcement director for the EPA who is in the state to help in the investigation, said that power companies are primary users of the substance but that they commonly have contracts with others for maintenance, handling and disposal of PCBs.

Officials have speculated that the oily substance may have been dumped by companies seeking to avoid new, stricter federal regulations on disposal of PCBs.

Only three sites in the country are approved for disposing of PCBs, with the nearest in Alabama, but Hunt said that the state would seek EPA approval for a North Carolina site. If forced to take the material out of state, he said, costs could be much higher.

Hunt ordered state officials about the spread of these materials to the area. The first spills were discovered in early August and identified as PCB more than a week ago.

"I think we made an adequate response here. You can always find a way to do it better," Hunt said. "You wouldn't go around panicking people, and they had to be sure they had it right."

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