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Iowa Averts Road Poison Disaster

DES MOINES, Iowa — (AP) — A solvent containing enough of a highly toxic substance to kill or cripple almost everyone in Iowa almost got spread on the state's gravel roads, an official said Saturday.

Pete Hamlin, a state Department of Environmental Quality official said there could have been a disaster if the substance had not been detected.

THE SOLVENT contained polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), a colorless and odorless liquid that is almost indestructible, he said. PCB can cause cancer and birth defects if ingested and has been held responsible for deaths

throughout the world, Hamlin said.

The substance was mistaken by a trucker for crankcase oil, often used to control dust on gravel roads, he said.

Hamlin said the Environmental Protection Agency in Kansas City informed him Thursday of the 10,000-gallon shipment containing the PCB and he located the truck Friday. How the EPA learned of the mix-up was not reported.

The truck's driver had mis-

takenly loaded his tanker with a solvent containing six parts per thousand PCB, Hamlin said. He said the safe level in drinking water is one part per trillion.

The shipment was bound for an Iowa firm that sprays gravel roads, and if the roads had been sprayed and the PCB had contaminated food or water supplies, it could have been "catastrophic," said Hamlin.

The driver said he was un-

aware the liquid contained PCB when he purchased it in St. Paul, Min., Hamlin said. There was no report on the intended use of the PCB solvent, and its origin was not known.

MONSANTO Industrial Chemicals Co. of St. Louis, the only U.S. manufacturer of the chemical, has announced plans to discontinue production by late this year.

Monsanto owned the only incinerator that can destroy

the chemical, but it refuses to burn PCB imported from other countries, Hamlin said. The state agency will test the shipment to determine where it originated.

If the substance was imported, it will be shipped to a chemical landfill, he said.

In 1968, about 1,000 Japanese accidentally ate rice contaminated with PCB. They suffered ulcers, jaundice, swelling, loss of hair, birth defects and death.

Legalities Obstruct Probe

DES MOINES, Iowa (UPI)—Efforts of Iowa officials attempting to dispose of a large quantity of crankcase oil contaminated by the highly toxic chemical PCB were being frustrated by legal obstacles and restrictive federal guidelines.

About 10,000 gallons of PCB-tainted oil were shipped into Iowa from St. Paul, Minn., last week.

The Iowa Department of Environmental Quality said Monday it averted a "near disaster" by identifying the shipment and seeking a court injunction barring its further movement.

State officials said the chemical could have entered the food chain and endangered the health of thousands of Iowans if it had been spread on roads.

PCB, if consumed, can cause cancer or birth defects. Officials said Monday the state faces serious obstacles in disposing an estimated 30,000 gallons of the PCB-tainted oil.

Federal regulations require that PCB be incinerated in special combustion tanks at the Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co. plant at St. Louis, the only U.S. manufacturer, or buried at a federally approved chemical landfill site at Sheffield, Ill.

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