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Hunt, experts confer on PCB cleanup strategy

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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 200 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 news 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. 41 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 would 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.

Meanwhile, Monsanto Chemical Corp. of St. Louis is preparing a list of North Carolina customers who bought the company's PCB product, Aroclor 1260, in the late 1960s.

The 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 soil to scrape away the top 1 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 35,000 cubic yards, will have to be removed by motor graders and, possibly, furrowed vacuum-suction trucks, Adams said.

The state property office, which has an inventory of al designated for hazardous waste disposal, has come up w a dozen possible parcels in North Carolina where material could be buried.

Parcels in nearly every one of the 10 counties wh spills have been reported are on the list, said State Prop ty Officer J.K. Sherron.

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

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

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