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GE Sued Over PCB At Oakland Plant

By Pearl Stewart

[redacted] more than a year after state officials ordered the giant company to clean up 30 years' worth of PCB contamination at the site.

The suit, filed in Alameda County Superior Court, [redacted]

The highly toxic wastes were spilled from heavy electrical equipment over a 30-year period in a transformer repair yard on a 24-acre site between 54th and 56th avenues and East 14th Street.

In December of 1980 the state Department of Health Services ordered GE to clean up the waste, which was found by health officials to contain up to 11,000 parts per million of PCB — polychlorinated biphenyl — many times over the allowed lever of 50 parts per million.

The chemical compounds have been identified as the cause of numerous health disorders and are suspected of causing cancer.

A spokesman for the company said the cleanup has been completed and the contaminated area has been sealed over.

But a member of the Sonoma-based PCB Project charged GE with failing to inform workers of the dangers of the chemical during the years before it was ordered to clean up the yard.

"This suit is on behalf of the 300 employees who came in contact with PCBs at that plant. They (GE) put a time bomb out there and now it's exploding," said Chambier Bechtel of the PCB Project.

She said project members met with 30 former employees of the plant who "all complained of illnesses ranging from cancer to respiratory problems." She said six were chosen as representative plaintiffs and attempts are being made to locate others who worked at the plant.

GE manufactured electrical equipment containing PCB at the East Oakland site from 1925 to 1948, before the dangers of the compound were known. The last transformers containing PCB were built in 1968, since 1975 the plant has been used as an electrical repair shop.

Allan Lerch, attorney for the plaintiffs, said an amendment to the suit will be filed within a week on behalf of neighbors in the area of the plant who believe their properties have been contaminated by PCB.

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