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Hazardous Wastes Being Moved From Frontenac Storage Facility

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After two years and several court orders, the Bliss Salvage Oil Co. is removing waste material containing polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, from a storage facility in Frontenac.

The chemical, a known carcinogen, was found at the Frontenac site after a state investigation of the Bliss company for burying more than 60 drums of similar hazardous material at a site near Dittmer in Jefferson County. That practice has been halted.

Russell Bliss, owner of the Ellisville company, had waged an unsuccessful legal battle with Frontenac, which wanted the material removed for fire and safety reasons. Bliss told federal and state environmental officials that he was unaware that PCBs were contained in waste oil, grease, paint sludge and other chemicals his company disposed of for various companies in the St. Louis area.

On Friday, Bliss began removing the waste, contained in large storage tanks near Gorman Boulevard and Dwyer Avenues, across the street from the Frontenac Racquet Club. The liquid part was loaded in two tanks and shipped by truck to Baton Rouge, La., where it was to be burned at an incinerator equipped to handle PCBs.

The rest, about 1,500 gallons of sludge, is being placed in 55-gallon drums to be taken to a hazardous waste landfill in Wright City, Mo., in Warren County.

Robert Zeman, an environmental engineer with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, said the chemical posed no health hazards while it was stored at the Gorman Boulevard location.

"Our main concern was that it be properly disposed of," Zeman said. "We didn't want it to end up where it shouldn't be. As long as it was in the tanks, it didn't pose any problems.

"But it's a known carcinogen. It's also known to cause birth defects in monkeys, too. If it's ingested, it tends to build up in fatty tissues and cause liver problems."

Frontenac officials were eager to get the PCBs removed quickly. That touched off a dispute between city and state officials over how the chemical should be disposed of, which delayed the removal of the hazardous material, Zeman said.

The city obtained a court order in February 1977 ordering Bliss to discontinue using the tanks and to move them out of Frontenac by January 1978.

The Natural Resources Department then obtained an injunction prohibiting Bliss from removing the two tanks.

"We wanted to make sure it was removed properly and was disposed of properly," Zeman said. "Mr. Bliss told us he was having a difficult time finding a place to dispose of the material. The chemical is difficult to destroy. You have to burn it at very high temperatures to destroy it."

The Environmental Protection Agency obtained a consent decree in December giving Bliss 60 days to remove the material.

"But the weather got pretty nasty and that prevented Mr. Bliss from removing the material by EPA's Feb. 7 deadline," Zeman said. "The city of Frontenac then obtained another order (on March 2), giving Bliss until April 6 to remove the material. On the basis of that order, everything has to be removed by Friday."

Bliss said he had no immediate comment on the matter.

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