

MAR 24 1981

Employees treated for rashes after working in City Hall

By STEVE GEIMANN

A Binghamton doctor is treating five city workers for prolonged rashes and at least one case of an acne-type rash after they worked in the basement of City Hall.

Dr. P. Keith Kennedy said last night that he has prescribed antibiotics for one man with the acne-like rash, and is watching others who complained of the itchy, red rashes.

The City Hall basement showed some signs of contamination after the fire and explosion at the State Office Building 40 days ago, although officials could not link the rashes with the toxic chemical problem in the office tower.

The most frequent sign of contamination from exposure to the chemicals is a skin disease called chloracne — a rash with pimples and sores on various parts of the body. Sometimes, the condition looks like teen-age acne.

"These men are working in areas that were not isolated before, but are isolated now," Kennedy said last night during a meeting of doctors at Binghamton General Hospital.

Kennedy later identified the workers as maintenance workers and city police. The basement contains the mailroom, police lockers and several offices used by police officials.

Dr. Arnold J. Schecter, Broome County health commissioner, said he was stunned by the report, saying he unaware of any health problems.

Kennedy said the rashes, which he described as flat and appearing mostly on the hands, disappear after washing and does not recur when the men are away from work.

The revelation came during a meeting with Dr. George Roush, medical and environmental health director for Monsanto Co. of St. Louis, Mo., the firm that made the polychlorinated biphenyls used in the transformers that was damaged at the state tower on Feb. 3.

Roush said PCBs are minimally toxic and will not irritate the skin, and said chloracne was not associated with PCBs, although he said he would not be surprised to find the skin problem.

"We have had no experience with chloracne at Monsanto," Roush said. "And we've had lots of experience with PCBs. If there's an effect on health, it's not very much."

Roush said the dioxins and dibenzofurans in the soot are more toxic than the PCBs, and are extremely toxic to fetuses of laboratory animals. Tests have shown a variety of adverse health effects in animals, including liver problems, weight loss and enzyme production problems, he told the doctors.

In humans, Roush said an internal study of Monsanto workers exposed to the chemicals in 1949 showed no increase in death or cancer.

Roush also told the doctors that if the signs of contamination did not appear in a week, it was unlikely the person was affected.

Hospital officials last night reported testing more than 400 people for PCBs using blood and liver profiles, and more extensive testing is being performed at Met Patn Laboratories in Teterboro, N.J.

Meanwhile, cleanup crews will return to the basement and sub-basement of the government complex today to begin recleaning overhead pipes that show traces of toxic dust in new health department tests.

Edward A. Mosher, the state cleanup chief, said a dozen workers will use detergent and scrub brushes to clean the pipes "inch-by-inch" until the work is deemed satisfactory by county officials.

In a related development, the first state agencies began moving into the Columbus School yesterday, a process that will last until the middle of next week.

MAR 24 1981

PCB maker's doctor finds few risks, but advises tests

By LIND FAYTAU

In spite of an assertion that polychlorinated biphenyls probably have few health effects, a Binghamton official last night recommended to county doctors that liver tests be run on those exposed to the liquid.

So far, there are no conclusive scientific studies on the health effects of PCBs and other chlorinated compounds. Dr. George Roush, director of medical and environmental health at Montefiore of St. Louis, Mo., told doctors at Binghamton General Hospital at a medical seminar.

"What does this mean? If there's an effect on health from PCBs, our experience is there certainly isn't very much," he said.

He added, however, it probably would be worthwhile to run liver tests on those exposed to the toxic chemicals at the contaminated

Binghamton State Office Building if only for reassurance.

Meanwhile, Broome County officials today received about 20 cars that had been impounded in the basement of the government plaza. In a warning, Dr. Arnold J. Scherover, Broome County health commissioner, advised County Executive Carl S. Young that new tests detected very low levels or no levels of PCB contamination on the cars.

In a related matter, officials said papers in the basement and sub-basement are being recycled as a precaution before the garage area reopens.

Tests Friday by the state health department detected up to 100 micrograms of PCBs per square meter on the basement papers, Scherover said.

"We anticipate opening the basement levels following the removal of the papers by the end of

this week," James E. Lee, Young's administrative assistant, said today.

It was not clear today if county officials would return the papers after they were cleaned.

Meanwhile, which was the major producer of PCBs in the United States, made the PCBs contained in the transformer that exploded Feb. 5 and spread toxic ash and dust throughout the building. Because of its involvement with the chemicals, Montecello has done several studies on PCBs and other chlorinated compounds since 1970, Roush said.

Tests with albino rats and hatched dogs have shown an increase in liver lesions, decrease in body weight and decreases in pregnancies among second and third generations after exposure to the chemicals, among other effects. One study of a group of workers also showed an increase of low cases of cancer, but Roush said

the study is not conclusive because exposure varied.

He said adverse liver effects in humans should be visible within a week of exposure.

David Slawomski, General's chemical and laboratory coordinator, said blood and urine samples have been taken from 400 people thought to be exposed to the chemicals. Liver profiles also are being run. In addition, blood samples have been sent to Met Path Laboratories of Teaneck, N.J., for PCB analysis.

Scherover said today the blood tests took reasoning so far.

Dr. Martin F. Kennedy told Roush last night he has seen about five city workers complaining of red, itchy rashes on the face and hands since the state building contamination. Kennedy said the symptoms lasted when the workers were away from the government complex and then reappeared when they returned to work.

He described the workers as maintenance men and police personnel. He said he has not seen the workers in a week.

Among its employees, Montecello has not seen any cases of chloracne, the serious skin disease characterized by black bumps linked to the toxic chemicals, Roush said.

Health officials have been most concerned about dioxin and dibenzofuran in the state building in addition to the PCBs. Dioxin is one of the most toxic chlorinated dioxins and is the dioxin component in Agent Orange, the dioxin and used during the Vietnam War. It and the dibenzofuran are thought to be combined by products of the PCBs or the chlorinated benzenes also present in the transformer coolant.

Slawomski said he has not been able to find anyone in the country capable of doing dioxin blood testing.