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EPA says firm violated rules on toxic PCBs

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is seeking $131,000 in penalties against the Redfern Petroleum Co. of Missouri, saying the company violated rules regarding highly poisonous polychlorinated biphenyls.

It is the largest such action involving PCBs, an EPA spokesman said.

He said a preliminary determination has been made that the firm from Independence, Mo., violated federal regulations involving "the manufacture, processing, use, distribution in commerce and disposal, storage and marking of PCBs."

COMPANY OFFICIALS would not comment on the EPA action, describe the products of their firm or provide any other details.

The EPA's complaint says, "A tank containing PCBs had a valve which was leaking liquid PCBs onto the ground; PCBs were found in six storage tanks and the area did not have adequate protection means to satisfy federal requirements; a PCB storage area was not marked; and no records were developed or maintained concerning PCB handling."

The EPA also charges that waste oil containing detectable concentrations of PCBs was used as a dust control agent on roads; PCBs were sold and distributed in commerce without first obtaining exemptions in accordance with federal regulations; and Redfern Petroleum Co. has continued to sell and distribute PCBs in commerce since the EPA inspection, the spokesman said.

THE INSPECTION and investigation was made in late August and the complaint was filed Sept. 5, the spokesman said.

He said that "chronic long-term toxic effects can result when humans and warm-blooded animals are exposed to even very low concentrations of the chemical. Workers exposed to PCB over a period of time showed symptoms including skin disorders, respiratory infections and impotency."

He added, "As far as I know, it's never been fatal."

Redfern Petroleum has 35 days to request a hearing on the charges, the spokesman said.

After such a request, the Washington, D.C., office would appoint a hearing judge who would rule on the firm's guilt or innocence, the spokesman said.

Redfern Petroleum could appeal the decision and also could "seek penalties through the court system," the spokesman said.