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Disposal of contaminated oil begins in Iowa

Des Moines, Iowa (AP) — The Iowa Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Monday began disposing of 17,000 gallons of waste oil containing deadly polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and released the oil under guard at Cedar Falls.

Larry Crane, DEQ executive director, said further tests confirmed that the waste oil at Cedar Falls contained no PCB or other toxic chemicals.

PCB is a thick, colorless, odorless liquid that can cause cancer, birth defects or death if ingested. The PCB-contaminated oil was shipped to Iowa from Minnesota for use in controlling dust on roads.

Samples from tanks at Cedar Falls were checked at the State Hygienic Laboratory at Iowa City and by a federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) laboratory in Kansas City, Crane said.

"They confirmed that no PCB or other toxic materials were in that oil," said Pete Hamlin, an Iowa DEQ spokesman, "so we are releasing the guard on those tanks."

Tests are not complete on a tank in Ft. Dodge and another in Marion. Once the results are in, "we hope the problem is finally over," Hamlin said.

The PCB-contaminated waste oil, stored in three tanks and a transport truck in Ft. Dodge and Marion, will be trucked to western New York State and then transferred to Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, for incineration.

"A cement kiln will be used at the Canadian site to prevent any contamination," said Hamlin, director of land quality management for DEQ. "That way, there will be no danger."

He said the Canadian Ministry of Environment has approved the method of disposal.

No. 2 diesel oil will be used to rinse the truck and the tanks, Crane said. The cost of disposing of the PCB-contaminated oil will be guaranteed by the state of Iowa.

"For this aspect of disposal, we're probably talking about $30,000," said Hamlin. "There's a legal issue here, so it's hard to say who will finally end up paying the costs.

"Someone in the chain of the events might have to pick up the bill."

The contaminated waste oil was first discovered in mid-March, and at the time, Hamlin said, it contained enough PCB to kill or cripple almost everyone in Iowa.

The contaminated oil reportedly was picked up by mistake in St. Paul, Minn., and was shipped to Iowa by Capitol Oil Co. of Omaha. It was stored at Ft. Dodge and Marion in tanks owned by Al Schmidt of Cedar Falls.

Monsanto Industrial Chemical Co. of St. Louis is the only U.S. manufacturer of PCB. It has announced plans to discontinue production late this year.

In 1968, some 1,000 Japanese accidentally ate rice contaminated with PCB. Some died and others suffered ill effects, including ulcers, jaundice, swelling, loss of hair and birth defects.