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Federal report criticizes EPA on PCB handling

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H-T Report

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A General Accounting Office report issued last month is critical of the way the Environmental Protection Agency has been controlling the use and disposal of the hazardous chemical PCB.

THE REPORT charges that the EPA has been slow in developing regulations, slow in coordinating an enforcement program and slow in identifying companies that use PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls).

"Basically the EPA has been very slow in getting regulations out and getting a coordinated enforcement program underway," said GAO evaluator Bob Robertson. "The report indicates ways in which the EPA could better utilize its limited resources."

The report also stated the EPA lacks "overall direction" in its handling of PCBs.

"It's a huge enforcement job out there," Robertson said. "We'd like to see them do a better job."

The report went on to state the EPA has made little headway in identifying problem areas and has provided little help for areas that are trying to clean up the pollution. The EPA is in the process of preparing a response to the GAO report. The response will be released in February, according to Alan Carpien, an attorney with the EPA.

OFFICIALS IN Bloomington and Monroe County have long been dismayed by the EPA's handling of the situation in the Bloomington area. Mayor Frank McCloskey, city utilities officials and county officials all have had dealings with the EPA they consider inadequate.

City and county officals have taken matters into their own hands. The city has filed a $329 million damage suit against the Westinghouse Corp. and the Monsanto Chemical Co., and the county has begun its own clean-up project of a small contaminated area at the Monroe County Landfill.

PCBs — found in the Bloomington area in 1976 — are suspected of causing a variety of health problems, including cancer.

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