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Wastes Are Wanted Not In The Frontenac Area

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Russell Bliss, the Biloxville waste oil company president whose storage tank in Frontenac recently caused a low-grade environmental flap, says he's a bit baffled.

Ten days ago, under the watchful eyes of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Bliss began pumping 4,000 gallons of waste oil into a tank truck from the tank in Frontenac. The agencies were concerned because the oil contained residues of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which have caused cancer in laboratory animals.

The government agencies wanted the oil disposed of properly. So two of Bliss' employees, Jay Covert and Earl Paine, hauled it to Baton Rouge, La., where the Rollins Environmental Co. operates an incinerator capable of generating the 2,000-degree temperature necessary to burn PCBs.

Once in Baton Rouge, Covert and Paine reported, the same oil that caused such a flap when it was stored in a tank across the street from the Frontenac Racquet Club was poured unceremoniously into a holding pond.

It seems, Bliss said, that the Rollins Co. has a backlog of waste matter and that it couldn't get around to burning the order from Frontenac.

Bliss said he thinks he knows why something that was such a big deal in Frontenac was treated routinely in Baton Rouge.

"The EPA was making a big play out of this," he said. "It scared a lot of people into thinking it's a needed agency."

Not so, said the agency's Dan Schiat, an attorney who handled the Bliss case. The waste taken to Baton Rouge is "better off there than in a storage tank overhanging a creek bank in Frontenac," he said.

Bliss had waged a two-year fight with Frontenac, which wanted the material moved for fire and safety reasons. Bliss said he was unaware that the PCBs were in the material — most of it oil, and some of it 40 years old. It had been dispersed by various companies in the area.

A series of court fights ended when the EPA entered the fray, citing hazards to water supplies.