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Environmental News Release



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Boston...The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management have announced that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) have been discovered in material taken from an industrial waste lagoon on a site belonging to the Western Sand and Gravel Company in Burrillville, Rhode Island.

PCB's are polychlorinated hydrocarbons which are very stable and long-lived in the environment. In addition they can cause skin and eye irritation and liver disease in humans, and reproductive disorders and tumors in laboratory animals.

The material tested was removed last month from an industrial lagoon at the Western Sand and Gravel site. PCB's at concentrations of 290 parts per million (ppm) were found in the oily layer of 38,000 gallons of liquid removed from the lagoon and 50 ppm in the 350 barrels of sludge removed from the bottom of the lagoon.

Three other industrial waste lagoons on the site also registered 50 ppm of PCB's in the sludge portion but no detectable levels in liquid portion. The materials in these three lagoons are believed to have stabilized.

The Rhode Island Department of Health will be sampling private drinking water wells in the area for PCB's and other material, and will continue a monitoring program throughout the coming weeks. The suggested level of no adverse effect in drinking water is 1 part per billion.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management has retained a consultant to conduct more extensive tests of groundwater in the area and to develop a containment and clean-up strategy for any contamination. This contractor will install at least twelve additional groundwater monitoring wells in the next few weeks and all of these wells will be tested for the presence of PCB's, according to DEM.

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In addition, the Department said it will retest each of its present groundwater monitoring wells on a monthly basis.

DEM has tested several pits at the site which contain septage waste and has not found any PCB's. Removal of these wastes is expected to begin in about four weeks.

EPA will also test a sample of undisturbed soil one foot below the pumped out lagoon. The results of the test will serve as an index of the mobility of the PCB's. In general, PCB's move very slowly, if at all, through the soil.

Although, state and federal officials are concerned about the discovery of PCB's at the Western Sand and Gravel site, they point out that the material in the lagoon that was sinking have been removed and contained, and that groundwater and drinking water in the area will be closely monitored to detect potential environmental or human health effects.

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