



PCBs IN OUR BACKYARD

Almost half of the PCBs which are utilized on PEI are used on the UPEI campus. According to Environment Canada documents, 3630 litres out of the 7626 litres which are in use on the island, are located on the campus.

"There are three transformers in the basement of the utility building and three more transformers in the library" says Eugene McCabe, the Supervisor of Trades on campus, and the man who looks after the maintenance of the transformers. "Environment Canada checks them once a year and I check them once a month for leaks."

PCB stands for Polychlorinated biphenyls, which are synthetic chemical compounds used in a wide range of industrial and consumer products. They are used as a coolant and insulating

fluid for the transformers on campus. In recent years, the government has prohibited the importing, manufacturing, and offering for sale equipment that contains PCBs. However, this occurred after 16 000 tonnes of PCBs across Canada had entered the environment. And the current problem is that they are dangerous to humans but they won't break down naturally in the environment.

There are 6866 litres in storage in the province, but none of these are on the campus. All of the PCBs on campus are in use and there have been no leaks from the transformers since their installation. If there is a leak in the future, UPEI would have to store the PCBs and then leave it up to Environment Canada to dispose of them.

However, according to André Lavoire of Environment Canada,

this could be a problem.

"There are no facilities in Canada licensed to destroy highly concentrated PCB wastes. Nor can Canadian authorities simply send them elsewhere, since U.S. will not import PCB wastes, and most European states won't accept shipments either."

Lavoire also said that only 0.1% of the PCBs found in Canada are on PEI and that he thinks most people are really frightened because they aren't sure about what is being done by the government to control the amount of PCBs entering the environment.

"But really," he said, "Environment Canada is certainly making sure that the use and storage of PCBs are safe. They check transformers and other storage sites regularly."

Three Universities Among Major PCB Sites

by Laura Boback and Tu Thanh Ha

OTTAWA (CUP) - Carleton University, the University of Lethbridge and the University of Toronto have more than 1,000 litres of PCBs stored on campus, according to Environment Canada documents.

According to government lists, other schools storing lesser quantities of polychlorinated biphenyls include the Technical University of Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University, the University of Windsor, the University of Waterloo and York University's Glendon College.

The inventory - which lists more than 2,500 PCB storage sites in Canada - was released Sept. 8 following an emergency conference of federal and provincial environment ministers in Ottawa.

PCBs are toxic chemicals that were often used as a coolant for electrical equipment. Their production was restricted in 1977 after research showed PCBs caused cancer, brain disorders and birth defects on lab animals.

The ministers agreed at the conference to phase out PCB use by 1993. The meeting was held in the wake of last month's fire at a PCB warehouse at St-Basile-Grand, near Montreal, which forced the evacuation of 3,500 residents.

While promising to end PCB use in five years, the environment ministers' conference failed to come up with regulations to destroy current inventories.

Kai Millyard, a member of the environmentalist group Pollution Probe, said the ministers' announcement was only a "minimal" solution.

"PCBs have been a known problem for 15 years. It's appalling we haven't had basic disposal standards long, long ago."

Officials at Carleton said that PCBs on their campus are not flammable and that quantities stored are ten times less than stated government figures.

An inventory by the Ontario Ministry of Environment mistakenly said the university had 23,000 litres of the hazardous substance.

Carleton is storing only about 2,400 litres of PCBs in a metal cargo container outside its maintenance building. The amount - more than two liquid tonnes - still qualifies the school however as a major storage site under provincial guidelines.

Ministry official Greg Montcalm said the inventory error is significant and will be investigated. He said that inspectors inadvertently added "an extra zero" in March when recording the number of litres stored at the site.

The Carleton inventory is made of either mineral-oil PCB of low flammability or askarel, a non-flammable PCB used to cool electrical transformers, said Carleton security officer Mel Gilby.

The chemicals are locked in a heavy steel container and are inspected every month, according to Gilby.

"Storage of PCBs by itself is not hazardous if it is inspected regularly - but without disposal methods, you are still left holding the bag," said Pollution Probe's Millyard.

According to him, there are no licensed techniques in Canada to destroy highly concentrated PCBs like askarel yet.

The only PCB incinerator in Canada is located at Swan Hills, Alberta, but it does not accept PCBs from out of province.

According to the released inventory, there is more than 1,600 litres of PCBs at the University

of Toronto, found mostly at the school's Institute for Aerospace Studies and at the chemistry department.

There are 1,500 litres of PCBs at Lethbridge, 200 at Dalhousie and 240 at the Technical University of Nova Scotia. The remaining schools are described as having "less than one tonne" of chemicals.

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