

PCBs At Carleton Around For A While

OTTAWA (CUP) - There are about 2400 litres of PCBs at Carleton University and they will be around for at least another five years.

So could the other 7000 metric tonnes of the chemical stored in Ontario.

In all, there are more than 2,500 storage sites for the highly toxic chemical in Canada, including the Technical University of Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University, the University of Windsor, the University of Toronto, Lethbridge University and Glendon College.

The only way to get rid of highly concentrated PCBs is to burn them. But the only incinerator in Canada is in Alberta and it won't accept any out-of-province waste.

PCB's were often used as a coolant for electrical equipment. their production was restricted in 1977 after research showed they caused cancer, brain disorders and birth defects in lab animals.

In the wake of a fire at a Quebec warehouse full of PCB's in August 1988, provincial environmental ministers vowed to eliminate PCB's in five years.

But they didn't come up with regulations on how to get rid of them. And now, it looks like they will be around well after the five year deadline of 1993.

Ontario has been looking for a system to deal with waste from at least 16,000 industrial plants. Each plant emits waste into the air, water or soil - 80 per cent of it untreated.

The province is also home to 10,000 old hazardous waste storage sites.

Ontario's Waste Management Corporation (OWMC), recently proposed a site for an incinerator on the Niagara peninsula after an eight year search.

The proposed plant would cost \$300 million, and be complete in two years. After that would take at least seven years to dispose of all the province's waste.

Before construction can begin, there are at least three years of public, environmental assessment hearings before the site can be approved.

Area residents oppose the plan, along with the Toxic Waste Research Coalition, an alliance of environmental, agricultural and citizens' groups.

Coalition co-ordinator John

Jackson said the OWMC plan for a permanent facility is misguided.

"We don't need a mega-facility, we need smaller, mobile (facilities)," he said. He says the OWMC should concentrate on the four Rs of waste management - rejection, reduction, reuse and recycling.

"The way to avoid the problem is not to produce so much waste," says Jackson.

People demanding toxic chemicals be dealt with, but not willing to have disposal facilities in their neighborhoods, have frustrated politicians and environmentalists.

OWMC president Donald Chant, said public concern and the 'Not-in-my-backyard syndrome', demanded mandatory public hearings on the site location.

"We've tried to be speedy throughout this whole thing," says OWMC official Murray Creed. "But the Environmental Assessment Act is specific, and the requirements are massive. We've done so much documentation we've got a small library."

PCBs IN OUR BACKYARD

Carleton is not the only University which stores or has stored PCBs on its campus. In the September 22, 1988 issue of the GEM, the following story was printed.

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.

But the process may ease public fears and concern. "We feel we've done our work and have a strong premise," Chant said. "We're confident we'll obtain approvals (from the hearings)."

Even if they do, according to OWMC estimates it could take another three to five years for the plant to start work.

Creed says the site will bring little disruption to the area because there are only three residents living on the site. "One of (the residents) is all for it."

He said incinerator emissions would be equivalent to the exhaust from about 40 cars, and pose no serious threat to residents.

"There's no such thing as no risk," says Creed. "But it would be very tightly controlled risk."

Regardless, Chant says, the coalition is skeptical of the OWMC's facts and figures.

"They don't believe anything we say, they think we're lying. You very rarely change people's minds about this."

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 installment. 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."

LOCKERS

A limited number of lockers are available for rent to non-resident students. The lockers are located in the entrance lobby to the Main Cafeteria in the Steele Building. The cost for locker rental is \$5.00/semester plus a \$5.00 key deposit which is refundable at the end of the term. Keys are available on a first come, first served basis at the Department of Student Services, first floor, Robertson Library. Keys may be purchased by contacting the Department of Student Services between 9 am and 4 pm, Monday to Friday.

The UPEI Drama Society

Presents

The Bear

Summer in the Han
Palace

November 10,11,12

8:00 pm

Duffy Amphitheatre



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."