

Lititz-Area Ag Chemical Spill Results in Fish Kill

BY JACK HUBLEY

LITITZ — An agricultural chemical spill in Lancaster County last weekend killed fish and other aquatic life along a half-mile stretch of Lititz Run, as well as in one of the waterway's tributaries.

The incident took place on a farm owned by Irl Daffin of Lititz. A local farmer leases Daffin's land for field crop production.

The accident occurred last Saturday about 5 p.m., when the farmer was crossing a small tributary several hundred yards upstream from Lititz Run with a spray tank hitched to his tractor. The tank's hitch broke, causing the tank to tip rearward and spill about half of its 300 gallons of herbicide mixture before the flow could be stopped.

The mixture, containing atrazine, Lasso, 2,4-D and toxaphene, flowed into the feeder stream, turning the stream white, according to nearby resident,

Daniel Garrett, who operates a horse stable several hundred feet downstream. Officials from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of En-

vironmental Resources and the Pennsylvania Fish Commission were contacted and an investigation began Saturday evening.

Members of the Rothsville Fire Company alerted residents along a one-mile stretch of the stream, warning that humans and livestock should avoid contact with the water for four days.

According to EPA officials, the spill contained a three-percent solution of the four chemicals. Lasso and atrazine are two herbicides widely used for pre-emergent weed control in cornfields, according to Lancaster

Extension agronomist Arnold Lueck. The growth regulator 2,4-D is commonly used for broadleaf weed control. Toxaphene is an insecticide used to control cutworms, Lueck said.

"The one we're most concerned about is the toxaphene," said Fish Commission assistant regional supervisor Barry Pollack, pointing out that the insecticide is highly toxic to fish and other aquatic life.

EPA spokesman Robert Caron concurs. "It was more than likely

the toxaphene that was causing distress in fish," he said. According to an EPA publication, only existing stocks of toxaphene may be used at the present time, and all use of the chemical must be discontinued by Dec. 31, 1986.

As late as Monday, Fish Commission personnel reported seeing the effects of the chemical about one mile below the spill, and area resident Logan Myers reported dead fish in a pond located within half a mile of the spill. "The fish seemed to be trying to get out of the water, then they started to go

belly-up," Myers reported from Sunday observations.

Because the mixture traveled almost directly into moving water, cleaning up the chemicals was not an option, according to EPA's Caron. He described the incident as "minor," and said he expected the waterway to purge itself of the toxins.

"We expect next to no long-term effects," Caron said, adding that groundwater contamination was unlikely due to the small amount of chemicals involved. "The small creek that received the initial spill

may have impact for several months," he said.

Farm superintendent Elmer Kreiner emphasized that the incident was accidental. "It was no neglect," said Kreiner. "We're backing him (farmer) 100 percent."

Although prosecution is possible in chemical spill situations, neither DER nor the Fish Commission would speculate as to whether penalties would be imposed, since a chemical analysis of water samples taken at the scene had not yet been completed.

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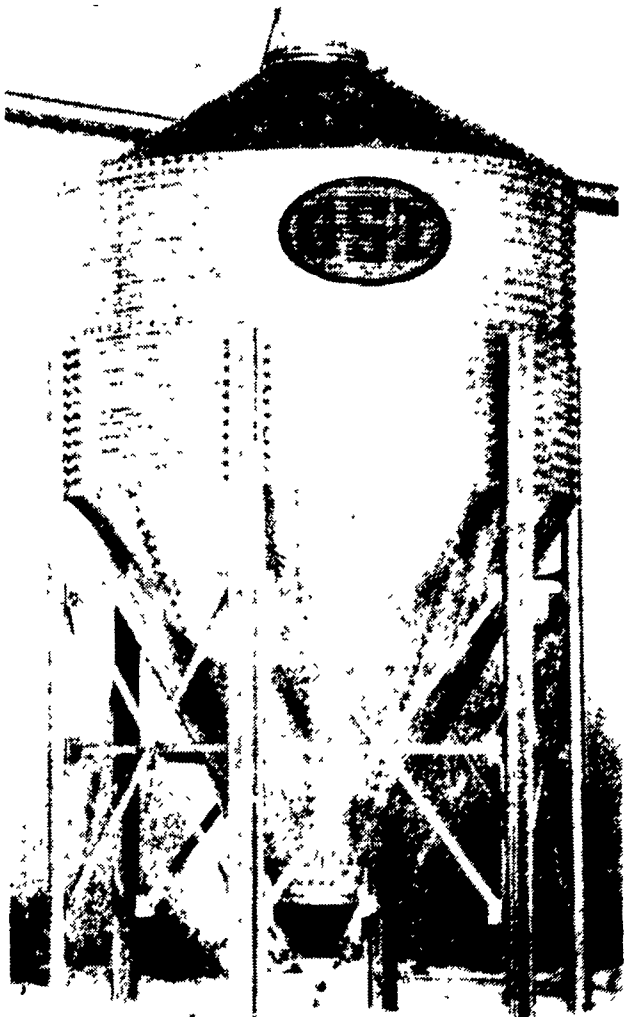


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