

Dioxin:

3-year-old federal report is news to officials

By RICHARD T. PIENCIAK
Associated Press Writer

A 3-year-old federal report listing hundreds of industrial sites in 33 states where dioxin might be found received little or no attention until the toxic substance was discovered three weeks ago at one of the locations.

Officials from almost half the states mentioned in the Environmental Protection Agency report, "Dioxins," told The Associated Press they learned of it only after high levels of dioxin were found June 2 at an abandoned factory in Newark, N.J.

In many cases where appropriate state agencies obtained the report shortly after its November 1980 release, tests for dioxin were not done, according to an AP survey of the 33 states.

Environmental officials said they had not acted on the report because of tight budgets, lack of technology to detect dioxin, emphasis on what were deemed more serious toxic threats and early ignorance of the seriousness of potential dioxin contamination.

"While the concern is there . . . we don't have the data to answer the question because of a lack of resources," said Rich Powers, dioxin expert for the state of Michigan, where dioxin has been detected in 10 rivers. "We haven't gone far enough . . . to know what the extent of the problem is at this point."

Officials in Michigan and seven other states on the list — Alabama, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Mississippi and West Virginia — said their state labs did not have the capability to test for dioxin.

Six states said they were unaware of the report when contacted by the AP within the past 10 days.

"I never saw the report," said Stephen W. Hitchcock, chief of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's hazardous waste unit.

"The bottom line is we don't know anything about it," said Atsushi Kiuchi, spokesman for the Washington state Department of Ecology. "Your inquiry is the first we've heard about it."

But in Washington, D.C., Rusty Brashear, an EPA spokesman, said of the report: "It's here. It's not like it's been on a shelf. It was not a document held in confidence. It was used here and intergovernmentally."

He said under normal procedures, such an EPA report would have been sent out to the 10 EPA regional offices, from where it would have been sent to the

states. Brashear said he assumed that was how the dioxin report had been handled in 1980.

Since the discovery at the Diamond Alkali plant in Newark of dioxin in concentrations up to 50,000 times higher than the 1 part per billion safety level recommended by the federal Centers for Disease Control, authorities have found dioxin in two more places in New Jersey and one in Kansas, all sites listed in the EPA report.

The Thompson-Hayward Chemical Co. plant in Kansas City, however, was tested because of the 1982 dioxin problems in neighboring Missouri, not because of the 1980 list.

"Three years ago, there was not that demonstrated, recognized hazard," explained Jim Aiken, director of environment for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

John Mitchell, a Kansas state environmental scientist, added that in 1980, "There wasn't a dioxin scare. . . . They thought dioxin broke down in the soil."

As a result of the latest dioxin discoveries, new tests are underway or planned for 48 potential sites on the list, according to the AP survey. Tests are under consideration at an additional 21 listed sites.

The 1980 report is a 371-page study of dioxins, substances formed as unwanted byproducts in the making of organic chemicals and pesticides. One of several hundred varieties of dioxin — 2,3,7,8-TCDD — is considered the world's most toxic substance.

The EPA has found evidence that occupational exposure to various forms of dioxin was associated with adverse health effects ranging from headaches to liver damage and deterioration of immune systems.

But there is no proof dioxin has killed any human being, and the American Medical Association last week said there's no imminent danger to the public, contending "hysterical malreporting" has made dioxins the target of a "witch hunt."

Appendices to the EPA report listed "potential industrial sites" where chemicals made or used could create dioxins under certain conditions.

"Obviously the question is, why have we not checked every one of these sites?" the EPA's Brashear said. "The answer has to be that we have to establish priorities here in everything we do. We've been looking at dioxin sites but our chief priority is the 419 'superfund' sites. We had every intention of getting to all this, and we still do."

Therapy helps former mascot to communicate after accident

By CHRISTINE MURRAY
Collegian Staff Writer

Former Nittany Lion mascot Norm Constantine, still fighting to overcome injuries sustained in a hit-and-run accident almost two years ago, can now communicate with his family and friends.

Constantine, who suffered severe head injuries when he was struck by a hit-and-run driver on Oct. 17, 1981, has been undergoing therapy at the Moss Rehabilitation Hospital in Philadelphia.

Constantine was the Nittany Lion mascot from 1978 to 1980.

Lois Levy, public relations director at the hospital, said Constantine is playing an active part in his therapy program and is communicating through finger spelling, a form of elementary sign language.

"Norm started signing a while ago, but it took us awhile to realize what he was doing," Levy said.

Signing is a skill Constantine had acquired when he worked with the physically handicapped before the accident occurred. He is currently working with a communication specialist to refine that skill, Levy said.

"We asked him the other day how did he feel. He said, 'I feel very good today,'" Levy said.

Constantine suffered a brain injury from the accident, which may be affecting his speech, Levy said.

The Constantine family has been very supportive of Norm throughout his recovery, Levy said.

"We see him every night," Constantine's father, Cy, said. "We are very devoted."

Constantine will probably be able to attend his sister's wedding in November, Levy said. She added that Constantine comes from such a tightly knit family that he would not want to miss the wedding — no matter what



Norm Constantine

his condition.

Constantine's father said, "It's so good that people (at the University) are thinking about him."

After graduating from the University in 1980, Constantine worked as a recreational therapist with the Unit-

ed Cerebral Palsy Association of Philadelphia.

Anyone wishing to send cards or letters to Constantine should address them to: Room 305, Moss Rehabilitation Hospital, 12th and Tabor Road, Philadelphia, Pa., 19141.

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