Residential Testing *continued from page 1*

operation. There may be hundreds of homes in the area where PCBs lurk at dangerous levels.

In addition to Pryanol sales, between 1967 and 1972, an undetermined number of residents used PCB-contaminated sludge from Rome's wastewater treatment facility at their homes as garden fertilizer.

During the past two years, GE and Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) have investigated contaminated residential properties. To date, 86 residences have been investigated. Of those 86 properties, soil samples have been collected at 52. 35 properties were found to have PCB levels in the soil below the safe level of 1 part per million (ppm), and 16 were found to have PCB levels greater than 1 ppm, triggering clean ups. At one home, PCB-levels in a crawlspace were recorded at 24,000 ppm—one of the highest levels ever found in Rome. And while GE has removed contaminated soil and restored the landscape at 14 properties, it has also refused to sample some properties. EPD investigators tested 16 properties where GE deemed tests unnecessary and found two with PCB levels high enough to require cleanups.

GE contractors work to remove PCB contaminated soils at this home in North Rome.

EPD officials admit there are flaws in the investigation that depends solely upon voluntary action by GE employees, many of whom have moved from the region or died. GE has generally tested soils only at homes where an eyewitness could confirm the use of Pyranol on the property. Concerns about property values have prevented many homeowners from reporting possible contamination while others are either unaware of or unconcerned about the health risks of PCBs.

While the voluntary program is the only means for identifying contamination resulting from the use of sludge from the city's wastewater treatment plant, GE has records that could help identify contaminated properties. Employee records are available for all of the plant's workers, according to GE site manager Richard Lester. These records include such things as job codes, social security numbers and, in some cases, home addresses for the workers at the time of their employment, Lester said.

GE could use these addresses to target residences where Pyranol might have been used, but Lester said GE would not support such a program. "I don't think that is necessary or appropriate," he said. "It is an invasion of the people's privacy. It's not something that we would go out and essentially accuse them [of using Pyranol]. We'd much prefer that they come to us. We've publicized this. They know about the program. They need to disclose it to us; it is not the other way around."

Because current residents of former GE workers' homes may not know all previous residents or whether Pyranol was used at the residence, such disclosures are impossible in many cases. Asked if GE would support a mailing to current residents living at addresses found in employee records, Lester said, "No. We have information on our employees [addresses], but that does not connect to Pyranol being used at that address."

In fact, GE has not sent letters even to former employees concerning the sale and use of Pyranol at area homes. "That wouldn't be relevant," Lester explained. "That's been a matter of public record in the newspaper and EPD's hotline."

Since the potential for residential contamination was first revealed in 1996, GE and EPD have been slow to investigate. In June 2000, EPD wrote GE requesting a list of names of employees who might have used Pyranol at their homes. Given three months to supply this list, GE gave EPD three names.

Despite its initial frustration with GE's efforts, EPD agreed to the voluntary testing program currently in place after GE insisted in only testing properties where strong evidence existed of Pyranol use.

Today, EPD calls the program a success, but still admits that the program is imperfect and cannot identify all contaminated residential properties.

Raydon Jones, a GE employee who sold Pyranol at the company's salvage yard in 1968 and 1969 and claimed in an Oct. 2000 *Rome News-Tribune* story that "hundreds of barrels of the oil were sold," said GE officials have never contacted him seeking information.

The company itself believes the practice was limited based on discussions with former employees, but some GE workers said the use at homes was widespread.

In the mean time, homebuyers remain at risk, and PCB contaminated soils remain in the community, compromising property values and posing a health risk to current and future residents as well as wildlife.

If you believe GE should conduct a more thorough investigation of residential properties, contact county and city commissioners TODAY.

Contact information is available through the County Clerk at 291-5110 and City Clerk at 236-4460

PCB Q&A

When were they found to pose a risk to human health?

Evidence of toxic effects in workers coming in contact with PCBs were recorded as early as 1936 and the same year scientists documented harmful effects of PCBs in laboratory animals. However, it wasn't until 1976 that the federal government banned the manufacture of PCBs. Other industrial nations eventually followed.

Where are PCBs found today?

Though no PCBs have been manufactured in the U.S. for more than 25 years, PCB contamination is widespread. This synthetic chemical which does not occur naturally has been detected in soil, surface water, groundwater, sediment, air, plants and animal tissue across the globe, including areas like the Artic Circle where PCBs have never been used. PCBs resist natural processes of decay and may persist in the environment for decades, and in the case of some PCBs, for centuries. Estimates are that as much as 3.4 billion pounds of PCBs were manufactured worldwide and that 30 to 70% of the PCBs manufactured remain in use or in the environment.

In Rome, PCBs have been detected in soil, groundwater, river and stream bottom sediment, in and around homes, and in animal tissue such as fish and in humans.

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