

Rachel's Environment & Health News

#25 - Waste Facilities Often Sited In Black And Hispanic Communities; 'Environmental Racism' Charge

May 17, 1987

Communities with hazardous waste facilities also have exceptionally high numbers of black and hispanic citizens, according to a study released recently by the United Church of Christ. This represents "an insidious form of institutional racism. It is environmental racism," said a spokesperson for the church.

Minority populations average 12% in communities without hazardous waste (treatment, storage, or disposal--TSD) facilities, but communities with one TSD facility average 24% blacks and hispanics. Communities with two or more TSD facilities average 38% blacks and hispanics, the study reveals.

Three out of every five black and hispanic Americans live in communities that have uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. Roughly half of all Asian/Pacific Islanders and half of all American Indians live in communities that have uncontrolled hazardous waste sites.

Copies of the report, which was done under contract by Public Data Access, Inc., of New York City, are available for \$15.00 plus \$2.50 shipping, from: United Church of Christ, 105 Madison Avenue, NY, NY 10016; phone (212) 683-5656.

--Peter Montague

CHILD DEVELOPMENT RETARDED BY EARLY EXPOSURE TO TOXIC LEAD, EVEN AMONG WELL-TO-DO FAMILIES

Exposure to very small amounts of lead before birth retards a child's mental and physical development during the first two years of life, and perhaps longer, researchers reported April 23 in the NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE. Even exposure to amounts of lead considered safe for children caused lower scores on tests of problem-solving, perception, memory, learning and coordination.

The Boston researchers studied 249 infants over a two-year period, dividing them into three groups according to their exposure to the metallic poison, lead. Lead exposure was judged from blood samples taken from umbilical cords at birth. The lowest group had less than 3 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood (ug/dl); the next group had 3 to 10 ug/dl; and the high exposure group had 10 to 25 ug/dl. Twenty-five ug/dl is the threshold above which lead is considered unacceptably high in a child, according to criteria set by the federal Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, GA.

Children in the low-lead exposure group consistently performed better on a series of tests aimed at measuring their overall mental and physical development, compared to the high lead exposure group.

All 249 of the children came from socially advantaged families. Thus, researchers wonder if their results don't underestimate the problem because, in an impoverished environment, the effects of lead might be amplified by factors such as poor nutrition.

The researchers point out that other studies of umbilical cord blood reveal that about 25% of all urban newborns have more than 10 ug/dl lead in their blood.

--Peter Montague

SOLVENT SPILL KILLS ONE, HARMS FOUR; ONE THOUSAND EVACUATED

A spill of solvents at a warehouse in Utah April 14 killed the plant manager, injured four emergency response personnel, and caused the evacuation of about 1000 people in a neighboring industrial park. About 900 gallons of trichloroethylene (TCE) and 300 gallons

of xylene spilled from a storage tank in a warehouse when a ladder slipped and broke off a 3/4" valve; the plant manager was overcome by fumes and never recovered. The warehouse is owned by the Hodson Chemical Construction Corp. of North Salt Lake City.

--Peter Montague

RAIL MISHAP SPILLS 200 GALLONS; 16,000 PEOPLE EVACUATED TWICE

Sixteen thousand residents of Pittsburgh had to be evacuated from their homes April 11 when 200 gallons of phosphorus oxychloride spilled during a Conrail freight train derailment. The tank car that leaked the 200 gallons held 36,000 gallons of the highly corrosive Class B poison. The chemical belonged to Monsanto Corp. of St. Louis, MO and was en route to Monsanto's plant in Bridgeport, NJ; the spill occurred through the safety valve on the derailed car. Emergency response personnel plugged the leaking valve with a tennis ball. The threat that the phosphorus oxychloride might react with water to produce a cloud of hydrochloric acid led to the evacuation. Local residents were evacuated a second time within 24 hours while cranes righted the derailed car and the dangerous chemical was pumped into waiting tank trucks.

--Peter Montague

HOTLINE: CHEMICAL EMERGENCIES

Anyone wishing to report a chemical emergency can phone the National Response Center (800) 424-8802, day or night. In DC, the number is (202) 426-2675, or (202) 267-2675. The person who answers those phones will help you contact state and local officials, or other agencies that may need to respond to the emergency. The Response Center is operated by the U.S. Coast Guard.

--Peter Montague

EPA UPDATES LIST OF BUSINESSES IT REFUSES TO DO BUSINESS WITH

The EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) keeps a master list of all parties who have been debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded from participating in EPA-assisted programs. The list is updated weekly and is available in all 10 regional EPA offices. For further information, see the FEDERAL REGISTER, Apr. 7, 1987, pgs. 11116-11118, or contact Frank Dawkins, EPA Compliance Staff, Grants Administration Division, Mail Code PM216F, 401 M St., SW, Wash., DC 20460; (202) 475-8025.

--Peter Montague

Descriptor terms: racism; studies; hazardous waste; united church of christ; environmental racism; african-americans; chicanos; hispanics; churches; statistics; ut; spills; trichloroethylene; death; solvents; xylene; storage tanks; hodson chemical construction; evacuations; spills; evacuations; monsanto; conrail; poisons; pa; pittsburgh, pa; phosphorus oxychloride; monsanto; trains; accidents; emergencies; chemicals; hotlines; coast guard; national emergency response center; emergency response; spills; leaks; fires; chemical emergencies; epa; information services; debarred businesses; blacklist; disbarred businesses; enforcement; compliance; compliance; developmental disorders; lead; children; new england journal of medicine; studies; central nervous system; statistics;