

Rachel's Environment & Health News

#180 - Commercial Hazardous Waste Landfills

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Despite widespread recognition that all landfills leak and thus contaminate the local environment, it is still common in the U.S. to bury industrial poisons in the ground.

There are 21 commercial hazardous waste landfills in the U.S. today; a "commercial" landfill takes wastes from anyone for a fee. (There are also 35 non-commercial landfills run by individual companies to handle their own wastes. In a future article, we will discuss these 35 "captive" or "onsite" chemical dumps.)

Of the 21 commercial chemical dumps operating today, 16 have received their final Part B permits under the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Five are awaiting approval of a Part B and, in the meantime, are operating under "interim status."

Seven of the 21 have permits issued under the federal Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), which allows them to bury PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in the ground. In the following discussion, an asterisk next to the location of a dump means it is licensed for PCB burial. A number inside square brackets indicates the legally-permitted total capacity of the facility, in cubic yards (if data are available).

The biggest chemical dumper is Chemical Waste Management, Inc. (often called Chemwaste), a subsidiary of Waste Management, Inc. of Oak Brook, IL. Chemwaste operates seven chemical dumps: at Emelle, AL [2,145,733]; Calumet City, IL [3,000,000]; Fort Wayne, IN [2,800,000]; Lake Charles, LA [5,300,000]; *Model City, NY [850,000]; *Kettleman City, CA [5,700,000] (Kettleman Hills Treatment Center); and Arlington, OR [2,180,000] (Chem-Security Systems, Inc.).

Chemwaste is currently expanding its Model City dump and plans to add a TSCA PCB license as soon as possible. Chemwaste has applied for modifications to its Part B permits to expand its dumps at Kettleman Hills, CA, and at Fort Wayne, IN. In addition, Chemwaste plans to add a 500,000 cubic yard chemical dump at its Port Arthur, TX, hazardous waste incinerator. This new dump would principally accept toxic ash from the incinerator but would also serve as a commercial chemical poison burial site.

CECOS, the hazardous waste subsidiary of BFI (Browning-Ferris Industries), owns four chemical dumps but only two are operating today; the CECOS dumps at Williamsburg, OH, and at Niagara Falls, NY both had their Part B permit applications denied and are shutting down. After this setback, BFI announced it would close CECOS itself and get out of the business of burying chemical poisons in the ground. This leaves unclear the future of their one operating dump, at Livingston, LA, and their new, aptly-named Last Chance dump near Denver, CO, which has a Part B permit but hasn't yet started accepting waste. No doubt they will try to sell these dumps to someone like Chemwaste soon.

GSX Chemical Services operates two chemical dumps, one at Pinewood, SC [135,000/yr], and one, which they are presenting trying to expand, in Westmoreland, CA. GSX also has immediate plans to expand an old dump, which is presently accepting only petroleum wastes, in Kern County, CA.

Rollins Environmental Services operates dumps at Deer Park, TX, and at Baton Rouge, LA; U.S. Pollution Control, Inc. buries poisons in the ground at Grassy Mountain, *Tooele (or Murray), UT [1,335,000], and at Fairview, OK [315,666]. EnviroSAFE Services operates chemical dumps in Oregon, OH [5,900,000], and in Grandview, ID [2,500,000]. U.S. Ecology has dumps in *Beatty, NV [1,000,000], and at Robstown, TX (where they operate under the name Texas Ecologists).

There are two privately held companies (which is to say, their stock is not for sale to the public) in the chemical burial business: Peoria Disposal at Pottstown, IL [2,400,000], and Wayne Disposal at

Bellville, MI. The Four County Landfill near South Bend, IN, run by a third private company, Environmental Waste Control, Inc., is presently not accepting waste. Wayne disposal is seeking a license for a new dump, 15 miles south of Bellville, MI, where they also hope to operate an incinerator.

Exciting new developments in the poison-burial business include these: a new company, Hunter Environmental Services, through its subsidiary, Hunter Industrial Facilities, Inc. (HIFI), is developing an industrial park near Houston, TX, where they hope to bury 100 million cubic yards of poisons in underground salt domes. This would be by far the biggest poison dump in the world. A HIFI representative says they will solidify the poisons in concrete or fly ash, or whatever seems to work, before burial. They hope to begin construction by October, 1990.

Westinghouse has also announced that their Environmental Systems and Services Division plans to get into the poison burial business within two or three years. A spokesperson for the company says they have identified five or six sites around the country suitable for burying toxins, but they have not yet requested a RCRA permit for any of them. They say they hope to be actually burying poisons in the ground within two or three years. "Landfill disposal is a logical extension of the services we provide right now and our goal is to become a full service company. We feel we have the resources and the management experience to enter that business and do it responsibly," said Vaughan Gilbert, a company spokesman. It is not clear what constitutes "responsible" burial of chemical poisons in the ground, since everyone, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, now agrees that all landfills eventually leak. (See, for example, RHWN #37.) This issue aside, Westinghouse has shown itself to be an innovator in the production and distribution of toxins into the environment. They effectively contaminated the entire town of Bloomington, Indiana with PCBs, then proposed to clean up the community by burning the PCBs in an incinerator, which they propose to fuel with municipal garbage. Based on their record of performance to date, we feel sure that communities will come out to meet them as they announce their new poison burial plans in the next year or so.

Three states are currently siting new hazardous waste landfills: Arizona has awarded a contract to ENSCO (an Arkansas company) to build a full service treatment storage and disposal facility near Phoenix. ENSCO has submitted a Part B application and a TSCA permit for burying PCBs.

Minnesota has signed a contract with International Technology Corporation (IT Corp) and Chem-Security of Canada to operate a hazardous waste dump in the northwest portion of the state. The capacity is reported to be 15,000 to 20,000 tons of waste each year. Preliminary site selection is scheduled to begin in late 1990.

North Carolina is reportedly in the process of siting a full service storage, treatment, and disposal facility with a capacity of 10,000 tons per year, including a dump for toxic incinerator ash.

It is interesting to note that 20 of these 21 landfills use high density polyethylene (HDPE) plastic liners to try to protect the local environment from contamination. On the shortcomings of HDPE, see RHWN #117. The Rollins dump in Deer Park, TX, relies entirely on clay. (On clay, see RHWN #125).

Of the 35 captive or on-site, non-commercial chemical dumps operating today, more than half (18) are in Texas; West Virginia has three; Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Indiana and Michigan each have two; New Jersey, Illinois, and California each have one. Overall, we note a high proportion of chemical poison dumps in southern states.

During 1989, the nation's 21 commercial chemical dumps buried 2.98 million tons of poisons; the 35 captive or on-site dumps buried 680,000 tons.

This summary is based mainly on information appearing in the February, 1990, issue of EI DIGEST a monthly magazine subtitled Industrial and Hazardous Waste Management. EI DIGEST is available for \$350 per year from Environmental Information, Ltd., 4801 West 81st Street, Suite 119, Minneapolis, MN 55437; phone (612) 831-2473.

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