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Memo Contamination

USFS admits they knew of problem in '94

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NEMO — The United States Forest Service was informed of the dumping of a toxic insecticide in Nemo two years before any testing of residential water wells was performed.

"We started looking at this probably at the end of July in 1994," according to USFS spokesperson Glen McNitt. "The bottom line is we can look back and say we should have tested those wells immediately, but based on information at that time — we didn't test."

"Somebody is going to say we made a mistake and they are right," he said.

According to McNitt, what the USFS did do was ask the Federal Bureau of Reclamation to undertake a "Preliminary Analysis," of the situation.

This followed the report by a USFS employee that the toxic insecticide Ethylene Dithionide (EDB) was buried in large quantities by the USFS Work Center in Nemo following a Rocky Mountain Pine Beetle treatment program in 1975.

The USFS has reported that between 200 to 250 five gallon cans of a mixture of diesel fuel and EDB were buried at the Work Center in 1975.

Seven of ten wells which were

tested last week in the vicinity of the burial site showed levels of EDB above the Federal Environmental Protection Agency standards for safe drinking water with one well exceeding the standard by a factor of 100 times.

The Bureau of Reclamation report was filed with the USFS in February of 1995, according to USFS Facilities Engineer Bill Schleinig, but recommended "no further remedial action," as the plan for the Nemo site.

"They told us there was no immediate need to test wells based on the geological information given to us; there was little chance of EDB entering the groundwater because of light soils," said Schleinig.

The recommendation from the Bureau of Reclamation was made following a study by that organization of written materials and interviews with people who might have knowledge of what happened in 1975, according to both McNitt and Schleinig.

But the only on-site work done by the Bureau of Reclamation, prior to making a recommendation to do nothing about the buried insecticide, was the use of a metal detector to locate the possible location of buried cans at four possible dump site locations at the Work Center, according to McNitt.

No actual testing of soils or test-

ing of water wells in the area was performed for the report, he said. McNitt said the USFS began working on getting the necessary funding for a clean-up at the site but this, he said, "is a long

process." The budget with the funds for the clean-up was involved in the attempt by the GOP-led Congress in 1995 to force a show-down with Democratic President Bill Clinton.

That fight led to a shut-down of the federal government on more than one occasion and federal departments having no budgets to operate.

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