

# Poisoned

## Forest service probes toxins dumped at Nemo

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NEMO — Seven out of ten wells tested near the United States Forest Service Work Center here show unsafe levels of toxic chemical buried at the Work Center by the USFS in 1975.

The chemical — Ethylene Dibromide (EDB) — was used in the mid-1970's by the USFS to kill the Rocky Mountain Pine Beetle, according to Forest Service spokesman Glen McNitt.

Forest officials began testing area wells after an employee of the USFS remembered burying 200 to 250 five-gallon cans of a mix of diesel fuel and EDB at one of four sites at the Work Center.

Testing began Tuesday with results returning Wednesday. This was followed by a second round of testing that morning to confirm the problem, said McNitt.

According to McNitt, allowable levels of EDB for safe drinking water is at 50 parts per trillion. Levels found at the seven wells tested to date show levels ranging from "around one hundred up to one well that had 5,000 parts per trillion."

The Environmental Protection Agency banned the use of EDB in 1984 due to laboratory tests showing it to be "strongly carcinogenic," or cancer-causing in laboratory animals, according to EPA Toxicologist Chris Weis.

He said the level of 50 ppt (parts per trillion) was "very conservative with a large safety factor built in by the EPA."

While he specified he was not familiar with the particular site in Nemo, Weis said a concentration of 5,000 ppt would be "a relatively serious exceedance."

"Clearly our recommendation in a case of this type would be to eliminate exposure as soon as possible with concerns about drinking water as well as water in the house," he said.

The water used for bathing or washing can have the EDB come out as a vapor and "there would be concern about inhalation in a enclosed space especially in a hot shower or doing laundry," said Weis.

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**— John Twiss  
U.S.F.S. Supervisor**

cause "multiple cancers," with sites on the body where the chemical actually comes in contact such as skin, lungs and digestive track areas being areas of concern as well as other secondary areas in the body where multiple tumors have also been found in laboratory animals.

Other literature available on EDB questions the chemicals role in causing a reduction in sperm production in males as well as possible DNA damage in those exposed to high levels of the chemical.

Information given to fire departments cautions those exposed to EDB not to breathe or allow exposure to skin to the fumes.

Direct exposure to high concentrations of EDB have been reported to cause very serious health hazards including death in addition to fears about possible future effects of cancer.

The area involved, said McNitt, is approximately 0.23 acres on the south side of Boxelder Creek "... and is only affecting the properties adjacent to the Forest Service Work Center," according to McNitt.

He said the Job Corps Center "is not effected."

McNitt said in a press release Friday that "available evidence suggests that unlikely high levels of exposure are necessary before there is a health risk to humans."

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In the meantime, Forest officials have contracted with a national expert in excavation and removal of toxic and hazardous materials, EnviroSearch of Salt Lake City, Utah, to further investigate the site and possibly remove any materials found.

He said additional testing of other wells in the area is available "on request" to the USFS.

While Friday's release did not take in account any contamination of local aquifers, dye studies have shown traces dropped into sink holes in Boxelder Creek below Nemo to show up in areas just west of Rapid City and into Rapid Creek, according to United States Geological Survey Hydrologist Dan Driscoll.

"Certainly one issue that has been talked about in terms of aquifer vulnerability in the Black Hills is could there be a flow path into these aquifers from an insecticide problematic to a surface stream it was introduced into," said Driscoll.

According to State Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) spokesperson Kim Smith, the testing usually done on water from private wells would not indicate the presence of EDB unless the owner

specified this type of testing should be done.

Rapid City Water Production Supervisor Ron Barber said tests done on a regular basis to drinking water for Rapid City would indicate the presence of EDB, but tests to date have all been negative.

The USFS has taken bottled water to residents whose wells have been found to be contaminated and plans are underway to "set up alternative water supplies to them," said McNitt.

"We also know from preliminary information that EDB can be absorbed through the skin so we are working with EnviroSearch to put water filters on their water systems," said McNitt. "However, if a lot of minerals are present in the water we may have to look for another option."

He suggested supplying water in tanks and other short-term remedies are being considered if filtration of water does not work.

Lawrence County commissioners voted recently to join Spearfish in a study of aquifer vulnerability which will be funded over several years and produce a map showing areas in the county where any contamination on the surface could lead to contamination of deep level

aquifers used for drinking water.

McNitt said a search of files at the USFS was underway and interviews with previous employees was being done in order to try and determine where the actual dump site is as well as if there are other sites in the Black Hills National Forest where similar burying of EDB could have taken place.

He refused to rule out other sites being discovered as a result of this effort by the USFS.

Treatment of trees killed by the pine beetle did take place near Mt. Moriah in the mid-1970's, as well as other areas in the National Forest, but McNitt said he had no specific information about any sites other than the Work Center at this time.

"The Forest Service and Forest Supervisor John Twiss are very concerned about the problem we have found and have identified effects on landowners as a primary concern with getting the problem solved by removing any EDB contamination as our other major concern," said McNitt.

Determining if the aquifer has been contaminated will be one of the work tasks for EnviroSearch, said McNitt. Also, further sampling and drilling will take place to deter-

mine the extent of the problem.

A meeting with local Nemo residents, USFS representatives and a toxicologist from the EPA regional office in Denver is planned for Wednesday night from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Nemo Firehall.

Approximately two weeks ago, a similar contamination of EDB in wells in and around Woodland Park, Colorado, near Colorado Springs, was found and efforts are underway there to try and track the source, according to the Editor of the Ute Pass Courier Larry Ferguson.

He said a USFS owned site was near the contamination area, but the source had not been found as of Friday afternoon.

McNitt said he did not know if the burying of EDB was according to policy of the USFS in 1975.

Twiss said, "I am concerned about the affected people in Nemo including our own employees. We are working to provide water supplies and removing the source of the problem as quickly as possible. There is still much we don't know about the situation until the four dump sites are excavated, but we do know that some wells are contaminated and immediate action is needed."