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Drop in dioxin levels near Columbus incinerator

- *To:* dioxin-1@essential.org
 - *Subject:* Drop in dioxin levels near Columbus incinerator
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This article appeared in the Sept. 19, 1995, edition of the "Columbus Dispatch," Columbus, OH. It confirms what the local activists have suspected all along: the incinerator was producing levels of dioxin that have significantly dropped since the facility was closed. The article follows.

DIOXIN DIPS SINCE PLANT'S CLOSING - Levels Drop 46 percent
By Scott Powers, "The Columbus Dispatch," September 19, 1995.

Dioxin levels in the air have dropped in most South Side areas around the former trash-burning power plant since the incinerator was closed last December, a study has found.

Ambient air samples taken in May and June by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency found significant drops in dioxin levels in the air at three places near the plant, slight drops at two other places and an increase in a sixth place, compared with similar tests done in April and May of 1994.

The new study's results say three things: People living on the South Side now have less health risk from dioxin than before the plant closed; The trash plant was responsible for much of the dioxin found in the air, an assumption many officials were reluctant to accept before; There remains other significant sources of dioxin in the area.

Dioxin is a toxic mixture of chemicals that can be created through incomplete burning of materials containing chlorine. It is considered a probable cancer-causing agent at very low levels, and also has been associated with other health problems.

Ohio EPA officials cautioned that the 1994 and 1995 measurements do not compare easily because the wind generally was blowing in different directions. That helps explain why one place almost due north of the plant, in Berliner Park, actually saw an increase in dioxin this year, said Paul Koval, supervisor of the EPA's air toxics unit.

Still, when all six test locations are added together, the total dioxin level dropped 46 percent since 1994.

"This reinforces the common-sense answer - that the trash plant was a source a dioxin," Koval said.

Previously, that answer was not taken for granted by some city officials, even though measurements taken inside the trash plant's smokestacks in 1992 and 1994 had found very high dioxin levels in the exhaust gases.

Until now, officials only had computer models to suggest that the dioxin coming up the smokestacks was great enough to actually pollute the neighborhood air.

"It does appear that the solid waste facility does have a measurable impact," said Michael J. Pompili, assistant Columbus health commissioner for environmental health. "We have been committed to doing the objective science, and this is a part of this process."

Grove City resident Teresa Mils, a leader of a citizens group that has long been critical of the plant, said the findings should be a warning to anyone thinking about reopening it.

Columbus has been considering selling the plant.

"You have possibly on of the largest known sources of dioxin in the country; you close it, and you would expect a decrease," she said. "And in fact you have it."

The biggest drop was recorded in the air samples taken at the Scioto Trail Elementary School, which is about a mile east of the plant, at 2951 S. High St.

In 1994, the dioxin levels recorded there were the area's highest - more than five times higher than background levels found in rural air. The 1995 tests saw an 85 percent decrease in the dioxin levels outside the school. Now the school's dioxin levels are just slightly higher than background levels.

Those areas more to the east of the plant saw the greatest drops in dioxin levels - due to the fact that the 1994 tests had wind blowing to the east while the 1995 tests had wind blowing to the north.

At its worst, the 1994 dioxin levels represented about two or three additional cancer deaths among every million people exposed, the Ohio EPA estimated. The 1995 levels represent about one more cancer death per million.

"We would like to stress that the (dioxin) levels at the school, while higher than the others, were not deemed to be a big risk," in 1994, Koval said. "And, if anything, the risk has gone down that proportional amount."

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