Dioxin:
Connecting the Dots

What would you do if the soil in your town was contaminated with a poison that could change the very make-up of your body, causing serious health problems? What if this poison was also in your food supply? Here in Butte County, there is a substance that is doing just that: Dioxin.

This cancer-inducing substance is created during incineration or chemical manufacturing. One of the most potent versions of dioxin is 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzodioxin (TCDD) classified by the National Institutes of Health as a "known human carcinogen," meaning that it can mutate DNA, leading to cancer.

In 1987 a fire at the Kopper's wood treatment facility in south Oroville released a toxic cloud of dioxins that settled on the neighborhood. In 2001, the California Department of Public Health tested backyard chicken eggs from the contaminated areas in south Oroville and found high levels of dioxin. Butte Environmental Council repeated the egg tests in 2011 and 2012 finding that there will still some dangerously high levels of dioxin; levels high enough to trigger a recall of supermarket eggs.

More recently, Covanta's Pacific Oroville Power Industries has been burning urban wood waste and selling the toxic ash to local farmers as fertilizer. Butte Environmental Council sampled one of Covanta's ash piles in north Chico and the tests revealed illegally high levels of dioxin.

In 2001, the California Department of Public Health tested backyard chicken eggs from the contaminated areas in South Oroville and found high levels of dioxin. This year, the Butte Environmental Council repeated these tests, and found that there were still dangerously high levels of dioxin, levels high enough to trigger a recall of supermarket eggs.

A 2008 study on the pancreatic cancer cluster has investigated the 1987 chemical explosion and fire at Kopper's wood treatment facility as a probable cause. We already know dioxin causes cancer. Are we going to sit back and allow this toxic substance to be spread around Butte County? This newspaper recently reported that Covanta is closing the Pacific Oroville Power Industries plant, citing "economic unfeasibility." Even if the plant closes, this waste ash remains in the soil on farms through Butte and surrounding counties. The reality is that this company has stained the land with its toxic waste ash and should be held liable for exposing the public.

What does it take for our public agencies to take action to protect the public's health? Concerned citizens should immediately contact the Department of Public Health (530) 895-6711 or (800) 554-0350 and demand that they conduct independent testing for dioxin, and require that Covanta clean up their mess.

Butte Environmental Council
www.becnet.org

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