NewsChannel 11 Investigates: Toxic Waste Coming to West Texas, Part 1

LUBBOCK, TX (KCBD) - It is the biggest clean-up effort in the nation, and contaminants from New York's Hudson River will soon make their way to West Texas to be buried for good. The toxic substance could come through Lubbock by railroad, but the bigger concern is your water supply. NewsChannel 11's Nicole Pesecky is investigating what has become a state-wide controversy.

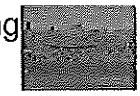
Click Here to Watch Video

More than a million pounds of PCB's, or poly chlorinated biphenyls, will be dumped in a landfill in Andrews, Texas. The carcinogen is linked to thyroid disease, learning, memory and immune system disorders. For the last 30 years, high levels of PCB's were found in fish from the Hudson causing New York to ban their consumption.

It's critical to keep PCB's out of water sources all together, but during our investigation we found out, the landfill in Andrews is sitting on top of the Ogallala aquifer, which is where many West Texas cities get their water including Lubbock.

"It's really a foolish idea to want to ship all these massive amounts of waste 2,000 miles to West Texas," said Dr. Neil Carmen, the clean air director for the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club. Carmen is not the only one who believes these contaminates are going to the wrong place - it is a highly disputed topic.

General Electric is responsible for cleaning up 1.3 million pounds of PCB's from the Hudson after they were dumped back in the 1950's, and GE is forking



over $750 million to do it. In the long run, Carmen says Lubbock will be paying the price. "The Ogallala aquifer and other water formations are just a matter of feet away," says Carmen.

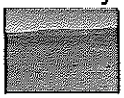
Linda Beach, Vice President and G. M. of Waste Control Specialists (WCS) in Andrews, disagrees. She claims there is at least 500 feet between the dump and the aquifer, and that's if there's even a water source there at all. "The aquifer below it is not really the OAG aquifer that everyone is familiar with - it's some water that is too salty to use for irrigation and is not drinkable," Linda explains.

Andrews City Manager Glen Hackler is convinced the aquifer is not under this landfill. "The community of Andrews did independent studies verified that the Ogallala aquifer does not extend into remote western regions of the county," Hackler says. But David Barry, spokesperson for the Environmental Protection Agency for Region 6 says, "Yes, the facility does sit above the Ogallala aquifer. It sits on the southern end of the aquifer."

We checked it out for ourselves, and it does cover part of the Andrews dump. So what are the chances of this toxic substance getting into Lubbock and other West Texas water sources? "In my opinion there's no chance," Beach states.

Waste specialists say the red bed clay is 100 times more resistant than concrete, so the odds of water draining into the aquifer are very slim. Carmen says clay is not leak proof, and it will inevitably become a problem. "It's just a bad idea to leave for future generations to deal with," Carmen says.

Even the citizens of Andrews are skeptical about what the future holds. "It will probably be after my lifetime, but I think it will eventually affect the water if they're not careful," explains one concerned Andrews resident. "If it's gonna bring jobs, great. If they're gonna hurt our land then they need to find another way to do it," says another.

So why is Andrews so enthusiastic about getting dumped on? "They put a lot into our school system. They put a lot into the community. WCS is good for 

Andrews," says this Andrews resident.

"I think over time there's going to be tens of millions of dollars of economic impact to benefit our community," says Hackler. He's confident this project won't taint their city or any nearby, "We don't in any way feel like this is a danger to our water supply."

One man who spent four years investigating the WCS site says the danger is definitely there. "All of our time has been wasted. We've all been played for suckers. We've all been pointless impediments to a process that resulted in issuing this license from the first day," he says.

Coming up Tuesday night in Part 2 of our investigation, we will hear from a former employee for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. He says, after 16 years, he quit his job after permits were granted to Waste Control Specialists against his recommendation.