



NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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\$5,000 Reward Offered for Identification of Illegal Dumpers

SACRAMENTO -- The California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and the Imperial County Environmental Task Force is offering a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person (s) responsible for burying pesticides in a pit near Westmorland. Westmorland is a small community located just west of the city of Brawley.

"It our hope that the reward will assist the Department and the Imperial County Environmental Task Force in catching and prosecuting the person (s) responsible for creating this illegal dumpsite," said DTSC Director, Jesse Huff.

On August 21, 1997, an Imperial Irrigation District (IID) backhoe operator was digging a channel for a pipeline adjacent to Lach Road near the Vail Canal, west of Westmorland and north of I-86. While digging the channel, the backhoe operator unearthed some buried metal containers.

The IID operator and two of his assistants were overcome by noxious fumes from the containers and required medical treatment. It was later confirmed by the DTSC that the containers held pesticides and herbicides.

The pit was fully excavated by IID, in conjunction with federal, state and local environmental health agencies. The pesticide containers, along with the contaminated soils, were removed at a cost of more than \$100,000. The pit contained 125 metal containers of various sizes ranging from one quart to five gallons. Some of the containers were intact, while others were crushed. The containers were estimated to have been buried for approximately three to five years.

Analysis of the liquids in the containers and surrounding soils together with the labeling that was still visible, indicated that the containers held Lorsban, Prefar, Betanol, Betanex, Prowl and Roundup. Some of the containers still had labels, but many were in such poor condition that they could not be distinguished.

A few of the containers had manufacturers' lot numbers, by which the chemicals could be traced to the distributor, but the identifying lot numbers did not provide the identity of the responsible party.

Investigators from the Imperial County Environmental Task Force interviewed the owners and lessees, and employees of the owners and lessee of all adjacent parcels. Tips on the identification of the illegal dumpers can be called into the Department of Toxic Substances Control at 337-1766 or the Imperial County Health Department, Division of Environmental Health Services at (619)339-4203