

Investigators say:

Someone planned to dump chemicals

6-28-84
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CORRALITOS — Investigators say they now believe Monday night's toxic chemical spill on Browns Valley Road was an accident, but that someone was planning to intentionally dump the chemicals, anyway.

That's the conclusion following the discovery Wednesday of four more barrels of chemicals on nearby Eureka Canyon Road.

"It lends credibility to the belief that someone had the intention of dumping the load (of chemicals), but he simply dumped it before he was ready," says Highway Patrol Capt. Don Anderson. Anderson says he believes the first 14 barrels fell off the truck as the driver tried to take a curve before the Corralitos Creek bridge too fast. Anderson feels the driver then continued on to his original dumping site on

Eureka Canyon and unloaded the rest.

Three hundred Corralitos residents were evacuated for about six hours late Monday night until firefighters and a toxic spill team determined the chemicals posed no health hazard. Eleven persons, including Sheriff's Deputy Mike Borchin, who discovered the barrels, and six firefighters, were checked at Watsonville Community Hospital and released suffering no ill-effects.

County Environmental Health and state Fish and Game officials determined that although some sulphuric acid was steaming from one or more barrels, the chemicals had not contaminated the land or creek.

A toxic spill cleanup team from Martinez hauled the barrels away to a certified disposal site in Kern County. The state will pay the cost of disposal.

As investigators were trying to determine where the chemicals had come

from, a lumbering crew discovered four more barrels Wednesday morning in a creek bed off Eureka Canyon Road, about four miles from Monday night's discovery.

Kevin Kirk of the county Environmental Health department said Wednesday's discovery "very likely" is connected to the 14 barrels found Monday night. "Identification on some of the labels seems to tie them in," he said. He said the four barrels were all in tack and that no apparent environmental damage was done.

"We've been lucky," says Anderson, who like other emergency officials fear this county could become a target for illegal dumping of toxic wastes.

"It's an expensive process to legitimately package and dispose of hazardous chemicals," he says. Additionally, there are only two Class I dump sites in the state — one in Kern County near Coalinga and the other in Santa Barbara County, both inconvenient to the San Francisco Bay

area and Santa Clara Valley.

Assistant District Attorney Bob Patterson said Tuesday that illegal dumping has become a serious problem in the state. He said he fears Santa Cruz County, with so many rural areas, could be a target of illegal dumpers.

State investigators have been called in to aid the Highway Patrol and Patterson in trying to trace the chemicals. Patterson said the task will not be easy because many of the barrels are old and the markings difficult to read.

"If we can locate the responsables, I intend to prosecute vigorously because I want the word to get out that any dumping in this county is going to be treated harshly," Patterson said.

The maximum penalty for dumping is a fine of \$50,000 and one year in county jail. Someone convicted of a second offense could be sentenced to two years in state prison.