

problems in the two cities.

The Federal agency's list, released last Monday, named the FMC Corporation's landfill near the Mississippi

Because of the contamination, two of the city's municipal wells were closed and redrilled deeper. The remaining wells are too small to allow deeper drill-

ings whose private wells were contaminated. The problem is more severe because they are not able to tie into municipal sources of water.

Even at high concentrations these

suited from wastes at a creosote pole-treating plant operated by the Reilly Tar and Chemical Company for 50 years until 1972, according to Paul W.

"I had worried about getting all the people through the lines." Organizers speculated that transportation might have been a problem.

Dioxin Threat Puts U.S. Under Fire

BY ROBERT REINHOLD

Special to The New York Times

TIMES BEACH, Mo., Dec. 25 — A small forlorn Christmas tree, its decorations caked with mud, stood today in the living room of what had been Paul and Donna Mansker's trailer home on Driftwood Street until a flood wiped them out three weeks ago.

Now the Federal Government has told the Manskers and 700 other evacuated families in this devastated town about 30 miles southwest of St. Louis that they should not even try to go back for fear of poisoning by dioxin, a deadly chemical waste product that was sprayed in oil on unpaved roads and an athletic field here nearly a decade ago.

The recommendation, made Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, bordered on the absurd for many here, who recently learned that they had been living and playing in the chemical for years.

"We are afraid of the chemicals, but we are worried about the rats and the snakes first," said Mrs. Mansker. Her husband added: "We must put our fears in order. Surviving is the bigger problem."

No official provisions had been made for the people here by last Thursday when the Federal disease control agency reported that tests taken just before the flood had found dioxin levels in some spots as high as 100 parts per billion, 100 times more than what is considered safe. While it said that the data were "very preliminary" and that further study was needed, the agency urged all residents to evacuate the town and to stop nonemergency cleanup activities. It urged all those who remained not to eat, drink or smoke in the area and to wear gloves and coveralls.

Judging from a drive around the town today, it appeared that few were heeding the advice. Families were seen spending their Christmas Day washing down appliances and furniture. Some wore gloves, but children were playing with their presents outdoors in the mud in the warm sunny afternoon.

There was not much choice, for the people here, in Mr. Mansker's words, are "between a rock and a hard place."

Many fear the poisons, some do not, but they cannot afford to do anything but try to salvage their worldly goods.

The dioxin situation facing Times Beach residents is one that may ultimately confront thousands of other Missourians. It now appears that substantial quantities of the toxic chemical were sprayed in communities across the state. The exact proportions of the problem are still not known, and may never be.

In Times Beach, there are those who question the immediate danger of dioxin. Marshal Ralph D. Case, the chief police officer, estimated today that one-third of the town's families were trying to live in their washed-out homes. He scoffed at the Federal report, arguing that the floods had helped by washing away the dioxin, a nonsoluble byproduct of certain chemical manufacturing processes.

Government Under Fire

Paul Mansker, a 39-year-old school custodian, disagreed with the marshal but did not know what to do. The Manskers and their three children, Shannon, 11, Kevin, 9, and Mickey, 3, have been taken in by Mrs. Mansker's parents, Joseph and Irlene Cashman. The Cashmans live nearby in Times Beach, but their two-story frame house is still habitable. The flooding Meramec River reached to the bottom of the second-floor windows.

Like many here, whether they agree about the danger of the chemicals, the Manskers and Cashmans are exasperated with what they see as extensive government incompetence and callousness.

The Federal warning was released, virtually on Christmas Eve, before the Environmental Protection Agency or the state had made any plans to deal with the problem. The situation has made the Manskers and Cashmans cynical. They say help only comes when there is publicity, and they eagerly granted a request for an interview.

"Somebody has got to be in charge to get something done," said Mr. Cashman, a sheet metal worker with strong craggy looks and a gravelly voice.

"Nothing is coordinated. They are all

pulling in different directions. We cannot get any facts."

Yes, he is concerned about the chemicals, he said, but what can he do without Government help? His home, at least before the flood and dioxin disclosures, was worth \$26,000. And his daughter and son-in-law still owe \$12,000 on their trailer home. Neither family can afford to leave.

"I cannot walk out and live somewhere else," Mr. Cashman said. "I am 57. I cannot get a new loan. So what do you do? Throw away everything in life you've worked for?"

"We feel betrayed by the American Government," said Mrs. Mansker, watching out the storm door of the Cashman house as her three children played outside, something the Federal Government had urged them not to do just 48 hours earlier.

She said that her youngest son, Mickey, had suffered from mysterious maladies almost from the day he was born here. He has played frequently at the athletic field, a couple of blocks from the home.

Child Suffers From Rashes

"He has rashes on his legs, and he always seems on the verge of illnesses," she said. "He's still not maturing like he should. They doctors say it is allergies."

The two older children have no similar symptoms.

"I am more scared for the kids than for us," said Mrs. Mansker.

Despite all, it was a reasonably happy Christmas for the Mansker children. After all, deciding on presents was easy because, as Mrs. Mansker said, "everybody needs everything." Shannon got a cassette player, Kevin a new portable television set and Mickey a tricycle. The gifts were piled up in the Cashmans' living room.

They were thankful at least that it was not cold, for the Cashman house still had no heat. There would be Christmas dinner at Mrs. Cashman's sister's house in Florissant, a St. Louis suburb.

But on Sunday it will be back to work, with the future very unsure. "The un-



Joseph Caskey, a resident of Times Beach, Mo., refuses to leave the town, despite warnings of dioxin poisoning.

certainty and no decision is hurting us more than anything," said Mr. Cashman.

The families displayed an almost fatalistic humor about their predicament. Only last year they planted a big vegetable garden, and the potatoes, corn, beans, peppers and strawberries

were delicious. "We ate lots of dioxin," Mrs. Mansker said with a nervous laugh.

"I guess what damage is done is already done," she added. Her husband interjected, "But the kids..."

What is perhaps most unnerving is the question of the extent of the dioxin

contamination across the state.

"What if we move and build a new house and then they say you're on a dioxin site?" asked Mr. Mansker, not expecting an answer. His father-in-law agreed: "What guarantee have you that if you leave this one you're not going into another one?"