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Cleaner accused of illegal dumping

EPA: Chemicals were hazardous

R. SCOTT RAPPOLD Dispatch/Sunday News

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has accused a Philadelphia supplier of dry-cleaning chemicals with illegally transporting hazardous waste and dumping it in a York County landfill. Gary Wasserson, the CEO of Sterling Supply Co., was charged in federal court with three counts of illegal transport and disposal of hazardous waste, officials with the agency's Philadelphia regional office said.

Modern Landfill and Recycling, which spans the Windsor/Lower Windsor township border, spent \$100,000 cleaning up the hazardous waste the company unknowingly accepted in September 1999, according to the EPA.

EPA spokeswoman Bonnie Smith said this morning **Modern Landfill** didn't know it was receiving the chemicals and is not suspected of any wrongdoing. In fact, she said, the company has initiated legal action against Wasserson to recoup cleanup costs.

According to the EPA, Wasserson's company, which provided wholesale chemicals to dry cleaners, declared bankruptcy in 1994. But it had accumulated hundreds of drums of hazardous chemicals at its warehouse in Philadelphia.

The chemicals were acetone, sodium perborate tetrahydrate, sodium hydrosulfite, isopropanol, xylene and naphalene. All are harmful and some are highly flammable, and their disposal is regulated by the EPA.

Hazards: The chemicals could seriously injure or kill people, and also pose an environmental threat, according to a press release from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

In 1999, Wasserson had the chemicals transported to **Modern Landfill**, which is not permitted to accept such waste. The manifest on the truck did not indicate it contained the hazardous chemicals.

Landfill general manager Tim O'Donnell said employees discovered the hazardous waste, contained in drums and buckets, as it was being dumped. The company then brought in special contractors and cleaned it up. There was never any threat to the health of the public or landfill employees, he said.

If convicted, Wasserson, 47, of Narberth faces up to 12 years in prison and \$150,000 in fines.

The case was investigated by the EPA, FBI and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

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