



### Dioxin spill was a real danger, says new analysis of Czech flood

Report

from [Deutsche Presse Agentur](#)

Published on 09 Sep 2002

Prague (dpa) - A laboratory analysis for Czech Radio and Czech Television concluded that dangerous quantities of dioxin leaked from a flood-damaged chemical plant last month and settled in sediment on the shore of the Labe River, which in Germany becomes the Elbe.

The two media outlets released the conclusions Monday, a week after the Spolana company reported only a small and harmless amount of cancer-causing dioxin washed away from the chemical complex north of Prague.

Spolana, part of the state-controlled Unipetrol chemical conglomerate, has been under fire from environmentalists and local residents in the weeks since flood-related breakdowns sent clouds of chlorine gas into nearby villages and spilled an estimated 3,500 tonnes of chemicals into the Labe.

Although no direct human health problems have been reported, the chlorine killed gardens and trees, and farmers fear their land may have been ruined.

The German environment ministry has been keenly interested in the leaks because the Labe flows north into Germany, becoming the Elbe. However, German analyses uncovered no sign that leaked toxins reached their country.

The latest, media-funded analysis by Axys-Varilab found dioxin along the shore in the village of Libis, about a half kilometre downstream from Spolana, in quantities three times higher than what is considered a safe level.

Analyses in three other areas nearby, including a field near the village of Vetrusice and a bridge crossing, found dioxin levels "a little more than usual", laboratory chief Libor Jech told Czech Radio.

A Spolana spokesman told the radio station that an August 30 analysis by Czech government inspectors found no serious levels of dioxin, but that the latest study would be seriously considered.

He also said the company, which manufactures a variety of plastics and agricultural chemicals, was drafting a cleanup plan for the area.

Ironically, Spolana's dioxin storage buildings were the target of a environmental protest by Greenpeace environmentalists earlier this year.

They warned the toxins could wash into the river in a flood, a scenario the company rejected. dpa ej sc

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Received by NewsEdge Insight: 09/09/2002 05:16:59

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