MIDDLETOWN, N. Y.
TIMES HERALD RECORD
D. 45,349 SUN. 41,720

JAN 3 1 1976

Rep. Ottinger says EPA failed

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WASHINGTON — A New York congressman charged Friday that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has failed to carry out its local mandate to stop the discharge of highly toxic chemicals into the Hudson River.

As a result, Rep. Richard L. Ottinger, D-N.Y. said fish living in the Hudson River are now known to contain levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) up to 10 times greater than recommended federal safety standards.

Ottinger warned that this contamination jeopardizes the fishing industry in the Hudson and poses a potential threat to the many communities which draw drinking water from the Hudson.

The congressman issued this warning at a house fisheries subcommittee hearing, where he testified along with four environmentalists and two EPA representatives, who defended their agency's record.

Ottinger's clash with the EPA officials brought to a head three days of intensive hearings on the problems of PCB's, the highly durable chemicals that have been used by many industries and released into the environment for the last 45 years.

The hearings showed conclusively that PCB's are extremely dangerous and must be taken out of the environment, and that a great deal of progress has already been made in eliminating the point sources of PCB discharges.

However, they also pointed out the difficulty in cleaning up the PCB's that already have escaped into the environment, and the need for congress to pass legislation that would prevent PCB-type epidemics from occurring again.

Ottinger, like the environmentalists who appeared before the subcommittee, called for an immediate national ban on the manufacture and use of PCB's.

But Bob Zener, EPA general counsel, said a national ban is hardly the solution to the PCB problem. Right now less than one per cent of the PCB's are being directly discharged into the environment, he explained. The other 99 per cent are already in the environment.

MONS 032956