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Menace

Polychlorinated biphenyls, better known as PCBs, are a group of chemicals now thought to cause human illnesses ranging from dermatitis to cancer. There's so much of them in the Hudson River and in the fish that spawn and swim there that New York State has now placed the river off limits to most forms of commercial fishing. General Electric, which uses PCBs as insulating fluid in the manufacture of electrical equipment at its Fort Edward and Hudson Falls, N.Y. plants, is generally blamed for the situation.

In the face of official and fisherman wrath, the company is saying nothing beyond the fact that the zero PCB discharge demanded by New York State Environmental Conservation Commissioner Ogden Reid is "technologically out of the question." Monsanto, the sole producer of PCBs, vows to discontinue as soon as a substitute is found. But there's no replacement on the horizon. Meanwhile, GE says it hopes to keep discharges below a 3.5 ounce maximum previously agreed on with New York Governor Hugh Carey.

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