Poughkeepsie Journal
POUGHKEEPSIE, N. Y.
D. 37,027 SUN. 46,969

JAN 2 1977

State, GE End Battle Over PCB's

Year In Review

The year-long battle between the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the General Electric Co. over the firm's dumping of PCB's into the Hudson River ended in September with the announcement of a $7 million package to restore the Hudson River.

PCB's, also known as polychlorinated biphenyls, are toxic industrial chemicals used in a wide variety of manufacturing processes. The General Electric Co. uses the colorless, odorless liquid in the production of capacitors and transformers at its two upper Hudson River plants at Hudson Falls and Fort Edward.

The chemical gained wide acceptance following World War II because of its nonflammable properties and relative low cost. However, beginning in the mid-1960's scientists have linked the chemical with a number of diseases of the skin, liver and reproductory organs. Many scientists believe it is a cancer-causing substance.

Environmentalists have estimated GE has dumped as much as 300,000 pounds of the DDT-related chemical into the Hudson River during the past 30 years.

Under the terms of the settlement, GE agreed to discontinue the use of PCB's in its manufacturing facilities by July 1, 1977. It also agreed to construct a $3.5 million pollution abatement facility at its two upper Hudson plants.

GE also promised to pay $3 million to the state Department of Environmental Conservation for use in a variety of research and cleanup programs and to perform $1 million worth of PCB-related research, making the results available to the DEC.

Because the state also accepted joint responsibility for the pollution due to its negligence in granting GE permits allowing the company to continue to pollute, it agreed to contribute an additional $3 million to the cleanup program.

However, under the terms of the agreement, GE is neither blamed nor exonerated for its role in dumping PCB's into the Hudson.

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During the year opposition to the use of PCB's throughout the country continued to grow and in September Congress enacted the toxic substances act which specifically prohibits the manufacture and use of all PCB's years. In addition, Monsanto—the only manufacturer of PCB's—

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