THE NEW YORK TIMES
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1975

G.E. ADMITS 65 GOT SICK FROM EXPOSURE TO PCB

By Richard Severo
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ALBANY, Nov. 10 -- the General Electric Company conceded today that at least 65 of its employes had become ill over a 15-year period under conditions that may have been caused by or aggravated by exposure to PCBs or polychlorinated biphenyls.

G.E. made the response in testimony that became public here during a hearing called by the State Department of Environmental Conservation which has filed a complaint against General Electric.

The complaint alleges that the company violated water quality standards of New York by dumping PCBs from two of its plants north of here into the Hudson River.

PCBs are used by General Electric in the manufacture of capacitors at Fort Edward and Hudson Falls.

The company said that 49 of about 1,800 employes working in areas exposed to PCBs had reported to its dispensaries "complaining of allergic dermatitis," and added that 16 more had reportad nausea, dizzyness, eye irritation, nasal irritation, asthmatic bronchitis and fungus.

The testimony was in apparent contradiction to testimony given by Dr. Edward L. Simons, a G.E. official in charge of environmental problems, who testified in May of 1974 that "the only medical effects that had been reported during the four decades we were in this business had been occasional cases of chloracne or other minor skin irritations of a non-chronic nature which disappeared upon the transfer of the employe to some other operation."

Dr. Simons's testimony was given in a hearing conducted by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency.

In today's testimony -- which was prepared in advance and represented the company's official position -- General Electric refused a request from Phillip H. Gitlen, assistant counsel for the Department of Environmental Conservation, to disclose the names of employes who had become ill.

W. Earle Evans Jr., an attorney for G.E., said he thought such a disclosure would violate the confidential nature of relationship between physician and patient. Mr. Gitlen argued that such information would be vital in determining the effect of PCB on humans.

The chemical in various forms has had a documented toxic effect on laboratory animals, causing liver damage, cancer and massive reproductive failures.

Last August state researchers reported they had found PCBs in dangerously high levels in fish taken from the Hudson River, with the result that commissioner Ogden R. Reid of the Department of Environmental Conservation warned consumers to be wary of the fish, especially spriped bass.

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