

COOSA RIVER GROUP FILES 500-MILLION SUIT - By Jerry Schwartz

A group of Georgia and Alabama residents filed a \$500 million suit in Federal court Monday against General Electric Co. and Monsanto Co., charging the firms with polluting the Coosa River.

The class action suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Atlanta on behalf of river property owners, business owners, and fishermen, charges General Electric with poisoning fish in the Coosa River by dumping polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) into the river.

Two weeks ago, Georgia state officials ordered fishing halted in the Coosa River because fish caught there were discovered to have high levels of PCB.

The suit charges that Monsanto sold the chemical to General Electric, which dumped some of the material into a tributary of the Coosa River.

General Electric, according to the suit, "willfully, wan-(garbled)..... allowed and caused PCB to be released into a stream that leads directly into the Coosa River."

When informed by a reporter of the \$500 million suit, a stunned General Electric official said, "How much did you say it was?"

William G. Lanham, an Atlanta attorney representing the river residents, said his clients "represent all aspects of people who depend on the river.

"We have people who own property on the river and have had their property values substantially decreased. We have people who own businesses--bait shops, marinas and so forth--who have had a decrease in customers.

"We have people who are at the poverty level and literally depend on catching fish in the river just to eat."

Since the state banned fishing, Lanham said, "the place is a ghost town all up and down the river." The people who live on or depend on the river "are in some cases just frantic," he said.

The suit claims that as many as 1,000 people may have been affected by river pollution. That is why, Lanham said the suit asks \$500 million in damages.

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Lanham said that he will attempt to prove that Monsanto did not fully inform General Electric of PCB's dangerous properties.

General Electric has a plant near Rome that manufactures electric transformers. PCB is used in the process.

Although General Electric officials concede they are probably the only current users of PCB on the Coosa River, they aren't ready to take responsibility for any fish contamination.

W. R. Buchanan, manager of employe and community relations, said PCB was used in many products until 1972, when Monsanto stopped selling PCB to anyone except those using it in a closed system.

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