dmits 65 Became Sick From Exposure to PCB

P. 36 '75 NOV 16 1975

By RICHARD SEVERO
Special to The New York Times

ALBANY, Nov. 10—The General Electric Company conceded today that at least 65 of its employees had become ill over a 15-year period under conditions that may have been caused by or aggravated by exposure to PCB's," 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 PCB's from two of its plants north of here into the Hudson River.

PCB's are used by General Electric in the manufacture of capacitors at Ford Edward and Hudson Falls.

The company said that 49 of about 1,300 employees working in areas exposed to PCB's had reported to its dispensaries "complaining of allergic dermatitis," and added that 18 more had reported nausea, dizziness, 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 have been occasional cases of chloracne or other minor skin irritations of a nonchronic nature which disappeared upon the transfer of the employee 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 Philip H. Gitlen, assistant counsel for the Department of Environmental Conservation, to disclose the names of employees who had become ill.

N. Earle Evans Jr., an attorney for G.E., said he thought that 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's 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 PCB's 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 striped bass.

The company also balked today at disclosing the sites of landfills where it had dumped wastes containing PCB's, because it felt that such information was not relevant, Mr. Earle said.

Mr. Gitlen said the company had disposed of "several million pounds" of PSB's in landfills. The Department of Environmental Conservation feels that landfill dumping may leach into the river or underground water supplies.

Nathaniel Wardwell, another attorney for the state agency, said the department was trying to establish that "G.E. is the principal source of PCB's in the Hudson ecosphere."



The New York Times/Joe Traver

General Electric plant at Hudson Falls, N.Y., overlooking Hudson River, produces capacitors with the use of chemicals known as P.C.B.'s, which may be polluting river.

MONS 032593