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New York State Will Be Negligent If It Fails to Ban PCB Releases

John Dyson is a fighter. You can say that much for the new state Commissioner of Commerce.

When he was the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets last year he fought against the proposed Breakabeen Pumped Storage Power Plant because it would destroy some of the state's finest farm land. Now, in his new post, he is fighting to allow General Electric to keep pouring PCBs into the Hudson River because now he is on the industrial side of the fence.

Issues apparently don't matter with Dyson. It's the fighting, the making of a name that counts. The former Democratic candidate for Congress, who whirly-birded around the old 28th District in a losing bid to Congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr., obviously still has aspirations for high political office. He has made more of a splash than all of the other Carey appointees combined.

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are of great concern to environmentalists and government officials all over this country not just because of a "mink in Wisconsin" as Dyson would have us believe, but because high levels of this toxic, industrial substance have been found in fish in all of the nation's major drainage systems, including the Yukon in Alaska. The high levels of PCBs being found in fish, particularly salmon and trout, threatens a 17 year and $96 million effort to restock the Great Lakes, and the $350 million annual contribution from sports fishing that the Great Lakes provide to the surrounding states and Province of Ontario. The high concentrations, which have been associated with the mortality of Atlantic Salmon eggs, also threatens the restoration of salmon in northeastern rivers systems. High concentrations of PCBs have also been noted in birds, particularly waterfowl.

According to Nathaniel P. Reed, the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, "...PCB residues were found in all of the fish samples from 100 stations located in major river systems throughout the United States, and in almost all the bird samples taken since 1970."

It wasn't "a mink in Wisconsin", but experiments by the Center for Disease Control, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, the National Cancer Institute, and the Environmental Protection Agency that demonstrated that laboratory animals fed PCBs in their food in concentrations of 100 ppm have a marked tendency to develop malignant tumors.

Refering to the lack of action at the Federal Government level, Secretary Reed said, "The irony of our position today is that our left hand is spending millions of dollars and thousands of man-years to establish a crucial resource while our right hand renders each new growth of this resource malignant. Our new resource will not only self-destruct but can place the human population in mortal danger."

To its credit, New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation has taken action, thought belated, to eliminate the PCBs being discharged into the Hudson by the two GE plants. With a billion dollar investment in water pollution control facilities along the river at stake, and much more that cannot be given a price tag, it would be sheer negligence on the part of the state to let Dyson win this fight.

(H.F.)

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