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Pollution Upswing Sparks Studies

ITHACA, N.Y. (AP) — New York State is increasing its monitoring program of state waterways because of increased industrial pollution levels, according to state Environmental Conservation Commissioner Ogden Reid.

Reid said the expansion of the monitoring program was prompted by the increase of industrial pollutants such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and acid precipitation in lakes and rivers.

"We will be monitoring on a continuing basis the Hudson, St. Lawrence and Mohawk rivers, the Finger Lakes, the Great Lakes, marine coastal areas and other important waterways in the state," said Reid.

"Our first priority is the identification of the sources of the polychlorinated biphenyls which have been detected in substantial quantities in the Hudson River, Lake Ontario and other state waters. We will also be sampling for heavy metals, including mercury, and for insecticides and pesticides," he said.

Reid said a pilot project designed to break down the PCBs already in the Hudson River will also be tried. Plants and marsh grass will be deposited in the Hudson between Glens Falls and Troy in hopes that the plants will speed up the decomposition of the chemical. The program was expected to get underway in spring. No details on it were available Friday.

Reid's announcement came Thursday at the annual meeting of the New York State Conservation Council here, just less than two weeks after he said PCB discharges from two General Electric plants over the past 20 years may have caused "irreparable damage" to the Hudson River.

The PCB chemical is used in the manufacture of capacitators, transformers and other electrical equipment. Federal officials have said PCB is fatal to fish eggs, may cause cancer in rats and can cause weight and hair loss in monkeys. Its effects on humans is still being studied.

Reid has issued a complaint against GE for the PCB discharges and has warned New Yorkers against eating fish that come from the Hudson.

Reid said a study conducted this summer by state researchers and Cornell University scientists identified 27 Adirondack lakes where fish life has died off due to the type of industrial pollution known as acid precipitation.

Acid rain is believed to be generated by sulfur from smokestacks. It sometimes travels hundreds of miles aloft before returning to earth in the form of precipitation.

"Acidity levels of about 50 per cent of the Adirondack lakes over 2,000 feet in elevation are the equivalent of vinegar—too high for the lakes to sustain desirable fish populations at all," Reid said. He said the department plans to lime 23 Adirondack ponds to reduce acidity to levels desirable for maintaining fish life.

Reid said the money for the increased monitoring would come from recent increases in hunting and fishing license fees.

He said the additional fee money would also be used to establish: -A pilot program for the relocation of deer from overpopulated areas in central and western New York to the periphery of the Adirondacks in the eastern section of the state.

-A trap and transfer program for wild turkeys and the development of a pheasant management program.

-Four cooperative hunting areas within a 30-minute drive of major population centers such as Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and New York City.