

GE Says PCB It Discharges Is Biodegradable

By LEE COLMAN
Staff Writer

HUDSON FALLS, Lucas P. Hart, general manager of the General Electric plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward said news stories concerning GE's discharge of PCBs into the Hudson River have failed to mention the type of PCB.

PCBs or polychlorinated biphenyls is a group of chemical compounds used in the manufacture of capacitors.

Hart said the PCB General Electric now uses and discharges at the rate of about five gallons per day into the Hudson is described by the number 1018.

He explained that PCB 1018 is 99 per cent biodegradable and has not been the type of PCBs found in the striped bass and other fish taken from the Hudson River.

GE has used this PCB 1018 since October, 1971, Hart said. Before that, when the environmental threat of PCBs was not known, a PCB of about 93 per cent biodegradability was used by GE.

Other types of PCBs — and Hart said there were many — have extremely large concentrations of the non-biodegradable elements in them and remain in the environment a very long time. Monsanto is the only maker of PCBs, he said.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation (EnCon), in reviewing recent findings of the Environmental Protection Agency, noted that certain species of long-lived Hudson River fish in the Glens Falls area showed higher than allowed levels of PCBs.

EnCon Commissioner Ogden Reid then issued

warnings about eating fish taken from the Hudson River, especially striped bass and other long-lived fish.

In the Sept. 1 issue of Sports Illustrated, the magazine's lead story by Robert H. Boyle, entitled "Poisoned Fish, Troubled Waters," discussed the PCBs problem noting that General Electric has been dumping an average of 30 pounds of PCBs into the Hudson per day since 1971.

Boyle claimed this was "the largest nonaccidental release of these poisons yet discovered in the U.S. and possibly the world."

Hart, in answer to the statements noted that GE has reduced discharges from something like 30 pounds per day earlier in the year to less than five gallons per day now.

Hart's major points were these:

— GE has changed to a (Please turn to PCB, page 8)

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PCB Biodegradable

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type of more biodegradable PCB.

— The PCB discharge from GE into the Hudson has been lowered and the company is trying to even decrease this five gallon per day discharge from both plants.

GE technicians and scientists are constantly looking for an environmentally (100 per cent) sound replacement for PCBs as it is used in the

manufacture of capacitors.

The Hudson Falls GE plant depends on PCBs for both capacitor manufacture and sometime transformer manufacture.

PCBs — a clear, waterlike liquid — is presently the most desirable type of compound for use in soaking capacitors because of its high stress levels and non-flammable nature. In order to have capacitors that are fire-proof, PCBs are needed, he said.

Prior to 1976, when PCBs were not considered a threat to the environment, Hart said that Monsanto was using PCBs in paint, heat exchangers and the so-called "carbonless" onion paper. Monsanto has changed its attitude regarding the chemical compounds, however, and now it is used exclusively in capacitors and transformer manufacture, he said.

The Sports Illustrated story noted that "when ingested in large doses, (PCBs) cause miscarriages and stillbirths."

Hart said that he felt the type of PCBs GE is now discharging into the Hudson were not endangering the environment. He added that he admitted that it would take time for the PCBs residue now in the river to disappear. He said it is the older, more non-biodegradable PCBs that EPA and EnCon are finding in higher than allowed levels in Hudson River (see in the Fort Edward-Hudson Falls area).

Hart said GE objective in the PCBs situation is to "obtain a practical minimum" in the amount it uses.

Illnesses Studied

The state Health Department in Albany said Friday that health department personnel are in the midst of making studies of illnesses due to PCBs in the Hudson Falls-Fort Edward area.

Since the state has issued warnings not to eat Hudson River fish, especially long-lived fish like striped bass, the Health Department has been conducting a cancer study aimed at persons employed at the General Electric plants in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls.

Both of the GE plants use

PCBs or polychlorinated biphenyls in the manufacture of capacitors.

Dr. William Burnett of the Health Department's cancer bureau is in charge of the occupational cancer study that is expected to be finished sometime this week.

The health department is also making a water sample study in the Hudson River.

Tests have shown that PCBs cause cancer in rats and illnesses in humans when ingested in large quantities.



New
Machine

Herb Beadle, of Greenwich, runs the General Electric Company's new PCBs injector machine located in the Hudson Falls plant. Company officials indicate the new process allows much less PCBs — a chemical compound — from getting into human contact. PCBs are used in the manufacture of capacitors like those in the picture.