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Conn. officials like GE cleanup effort

By Judy Katz

Top Connecticut environmental officials looked over General Electric Co.'s efforts to stop toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from oozing into the Housatonic River yesterday afternoon and stated afterward that they were satisfied with what they saw.

And one of them, Commissioner of Environmental Protection Stanley J. Pac, said his department would investigate landfills in the watershed to determine whether they are contributing to PCB contamination. GE is the only identified source of the chemical. The company contends that landfills are an important source of PCB pollution.

Pac and his deputy, Melvin Schneidermeyer, arranged the visit because of the concern aroused in Connecticut by the discovery that fish in the river below the Massachusetts border contain many times the federal maximum, five parts per million, of PCBs.

They were accompanied by a representative of the Connecticut Health Department, which recently banned eating fish caught in the river, and Salisbury Selectwoman Charlotte Reid. Ms. Reid is a member of the Housatonic Valley Association, a private Connecticut environmental group which has demanded action to combat PCB pollution.

Commissioner Pac denied statements in a UPI news story from Hartford this morning that he had raised the possibility of dredging the Housatonic to eliminate PCBs and had threatened to sue GE.

"As far as dredging," Pac said this morning, "we're not even thinking about it, although we aren't discarding any possibilities at this point."

And any decision to bring suit would have to come from the Connecticut attorney general, he said. "It's far too early to talk about that. I don't see it happening, because GE is doing far more than any other corporation" to deal with its pollution problem.

This afternoon at 2:30, the officials were to report on their findings at a meeting called earlier by the association to discuss the PCB problem.

What they will report, according to Schneidermeyer, is that "there is no dripping spigot."

Some Connecticut citizens, he said, have the impression that the federal Environmental Protection Agency has allowed GE "to keep a spigot going drip, drip, drip into the river with PCBs."

It is an impression which GE is trying to counteract. During yesterday's afternoon-long circuit of the company's PCB cleanup installations.

Schneidermeyer said the visitors had found what they expected, based on reports they had heard earlier — that the amount of chemical reaching the river from GE is seeping from residues accumulated over the years in pipes, drains and in the ground.

According to a GE spokesman, that amount is a little more than one ounce a day, well under the four-ounce limit set in the company's EPA discharge permit.

MONS 003198