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State, Congress move to cut toxin's use

By TODD STRASSER
Staff Writer

NEWBURGH — As a result of investigations and hearings into the dangers of polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs, state and federal agencies are moving to restrict its use and production. A local environmental group, the Hudson River Pipe-Watch, also has launched an investigation into PCBs and other toxins in the Hudson River.

The Hudson is of particular concern to environmentalists who fear that PCB counts as high as 53 parts per million found in fish may force the revocation of commercial fishing licenses by the State Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC). The maximum PCB level allowed in fish by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is five parts per million.

While evidence indicating what effects PCB has on humans and the environment are incomplete, scientists say they have found cause for regulating the production of the chemicals. Studies indicate that PCB can cause damage of the reproductive systems of some animals. Other evidence indicates the chemical may cause cancer.

According to John Harris-Cronin of the Hudson River Pipe Watch, there is one recorded case of human PCB poisoning. In that case, high concentrations — 2,000 parts per million — were found in rice oil consumed by a Japanese community. The Japanese suffered still births, hair loss and swelling.

Harris-Cronin, whose group has kept a close watch on Hudson River pollution, said 1972 tests by the DEC indicatednore than 62 per cent of the fish caught in the area of the Tappan Zee Bridge had PCB counts exceeding five parts per million.

The DEC held hearings on the General Electric Corp.'s plants at Hudson Falls and Fort Edward on the Hudson. Accrding to the agency, the company was allowed to dump up to 30 pounds of PCB into the river each day until January 1978.

PCB has a stable and enduring nature so, once produced, it is likeleto retain its chemical configuration for more than a decade, a DEC spokesman said.

The EPA is seeking federal legislation to extend its jurisdiction and authority over the control of PCB. The DEC is contemplating similar state legislation,commission head Ogden Reid has ordered increased testing for PCB in the state's waterways.

"Presently there are no federal regulations on PCB," the DEC spokesman said. The Monsanto Chemical Corp. produces almost allPCB in the United States,"but there are European manufacturers and we have no idea how much is imported," Reid said.

The spokesman said the Monsanto company has voluntarily restricted the sale of PCBS to companies who will use them in closed circuit products, that is, products which should not allow the chemicals to escape into the environment. PCBS are most commonly used as insulation in transformers and other electric-conducting equipment.

But, the spokesman said, PCBS are also used in some paints, lighting fixtures, papers and car tires.

The state attorney general's office is also seeking legislation to control the sale of merchandise containing PCBS. At a DEC. 12 public hearing held by Atty Gen. Louis J. Lefkowitz has resulted in proposed controlling legislation which will be presented to the state legislature soon, a spokesman for the attorney general said.

The DEC spokesman said his agency is waiting for the spring shad run to test that fish for PCB levels. If the levels are dangerously high, he said, the commercial fisheries on the Hudson may be shut down. In 1974 the fisheries took 200,000 pounds of shad out of the river.

The shutdown would not be the first because of PCBS. Salmon fishing on Lake Ontario has been banned because of high concentrations found in these fish.

The DEC spokesman said general electric is the only known user of PCBS on the Hudson. Small mouth bass tested below the plants have had concentrations as high as 53 parts per million. Walleyes have been found with concentrations as high as 32 parts per million.



From both sides

Montgomery Supervisor Carl L. Holstrom got it from both sides Wednesday as the town kicked off its bicentennial celebration on the 200th anniversary of Gen. Richard Montgomery's death during the fight for Quebec. County Historian Donald F. Clark, left, presents Holstrom with an engraving of the general, and Col. Frederick P. Todd, Ret. presents a bicentennial flag.
— Record photo by Fred Bloch

Pipe-Watch watching more than just PCB

POUGHKEEPSIE — For John Harris-Cronin and the other members of the Hudson River pipe-watch, PCBs are only one of about 199 toxins which threaten to contaminate the river.

Harris-Cronin and his group of environmentalists and college students see themselves as the watchdogs of the Hudson's waters. They take samples of water near known polluters to see if the companies are staying within their permitted discharge ranges, and try to get something done when a company is in violation.

Harris-Cronin saidthere are about 1,500 water polltutors on the Hudson releasing about 199 different toxins into its waters.

The pipe-watch has begun an intensive effort to bring such violations under control. They are researching all suspected polluters on the river, testing water and investigating government files and lab reports in search of undiscovered toxins.

While polluting activities may be recorded in government files, Harris-Cronin said,often nothing is done until an emergency is made. That was true in the case of PCBs, he said.

"They knew about them years ago," he said.

General Electric subject of next round of debate

By FRED KIRSCH
Staff Writer

The third round of the PCB debate will take place later this month when a hearing examiner decides if General Electric has violated state water-quality standards by discharging toxic chemicals into the Hudson River from two upstate plants.

The decision, which will be handed down by Dr. Abraham Sofaer of Columbia University, could have landmark effects. If General Electric is found guilty, it may be squired to do considerably more than stop its current discharge of PCBs—polychlorinated biphenyls—from its Hudson Falls and Fort Edward plants, located about 90 miles above Albany.

State Environmental Commissioner Ogden R. Reid has indicated he will ask General Electric to pay reparations "for the damage it has done a great river." Reid wants General Electric to pay the cost—which some estimates place as high as $10 million—of cleaning the Hudson of 15 years of PCB discharges.

Such an action would be an unprecedented step toward establishing more stringent codes for industry's responsibility for pollution. If Reid is successful, it would mean that industry would be responsible not only for its future effect upon the environment, but also for its past actions.

In five months, the GE vs. SDEC debate has moved through two fast-paced rounds. It began in August with Reid warning consumers about the dangers of eating fish contaminated with high levels of PCB and making several trips to Hudson fisheries. It then moved into a near-empty room in Albany last December for several days of testimony when the SDEC called for a hearing. The hearing, which at times bordered on the bizarre, ended in startling fashion with General Electric repudiating its own expert witness—Dr. Gerald Lauer of Ecological Analysts, Inc., of Middletown—and in effect accepting the state's findings that the discharges of toxic chemicals from their plants has been heavy enough to poison fish.

So far, only General Electric has been documented as putting PCB into the Hudson River. However, the Monsanto Corporation, the nation's only producer of PCB, reports that other companies have bought substantial amounts n 1974. The companies are the York Capacitor Co. of Brooklyn, Axel Electronics of Jamaica, Queens, and Niagara Transformer Corp

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