D Wood - St Louis

PCB Cleanup

E-5

Bacteria may aid pollution fight

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — The state department of environmental conservation said yesterday it is studying research by a Canadian scientist who has discovered a new strain of bacteria that feeds on PCBs (pdychlorinated biphenyls) that are polluting the Hudson River.

However, a spokesman for the department said it is not yet known whether the bacteria can be used on a mass scale to eliminate such widespread industrial pollution as is found in the Hudson.

Dr. Dickson Liu, a researcher at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters in Burlington, Ont., announced his discovery earlier this month. Ultrasonic vibrations are utilized in his process to disperse PCBs into fine particles which can be devoured by the new strain of bacteria.

PCBs are man-made organic chemicals used in the manufacture of capacitors. They are non-biodegradable and are known to cause serious ailments in fish and other animals.

Their impact on humans is not yet known but the state considers them a threat to humans as well as animals and has banned commercial fishing in the Hudson due to PCB contamination.

The announcement of the department study came as the state announced new hearings in its dispute with the General Electric Co. over PCB pollution of the Hudson. The hearings, to begin April 5, will consider penalties to be assessed against GE.

"We're still looking at the discovery to see if it could work at GE," the state spokesman said. "But at this point, there isn't enough data to show whether it would apply to our situation."

Recent state hearings found GE in violation of two sections of the state environmental conservation law for dumping the pollutants into the river in dangerous amounts from two up-state plants on the Hudson.

A researcher for the environmental conservation department said Liu's technique, thus far, is limited to small areas.

The researcher said it would take an enormous amount of energy to create ultrasonic vibrations throughout the Hudson. Without the vibrations, the PCBs would not be broken up and the bacteria would be ineffective.

Canadian experts say the value of the technique is likely to be in the treatment of PCB-rich industrial wastes and concede it may never be adapted to produce results in the environment.

Liu is beginning a one-year pilot project, specifically testing his technique on industrial wastes.

Both GE and the department plan to monitor the project and st[illegible]y its results.

MONS 031812