THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1975

44 L

The New York Times

Founded in 1851
ADOLPH S. OCHS, Publisher 1896-1935
ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER, Publisher 1935-1961
ORVIL E. DRYFOOS, Publisher 1961-1963

'A Failure Here'

Commissioner Ogden R. Reid of the State Department of Environmental Conservation has moved to stop two General Electric plants from dumping highly toxic chemical compounds into the Hudson River. The compounds, known as PCBs, are responsible for so high a degree of toxicity in fish that the commissioner felt compelled a month ago to warn against eating striped bass from the Hudson and coho salmon from Lake Ontario.

Mr. Reid's action against G. E.—in the form of a proposed order, subject to public hearings—should have been taken long before he took office, since the hazardous discharge was known both to the Federal Environmental Protection Agency and to the state agency. His observation that "there has been a failure here" is hardly open to argument.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), which are used in the manufacture of electric equipment, paints and hydraulic fluid among other products, have been proved poisonous to fish and severely damaging to the reproductive processes of many animals. In Japan a prolonged intake of the substance in rice oils was held responsible for sixteen deaths and two stillbirths. Indeed, the very durability of the compounds—far more lasting than DDT—is precisely the source of their industrial appeal.

Commissioner Reid's proposed order would reduce the company's discharge of PCBs—once as high as ninety pounds a day—to three pounds a day within a week of the order's effective date, two pounds by the end of this year and zero by Sept. 30, 1976. Twelve hundred jobs would be jeopardized if an order for immediate total cessation necessitated closing the two plants. But delay has its own high cost to public health. Contamination of the Hudson's sediment may already have made the damage irreversible—a monstrous price to pay for the improved efficiency of a handful of products.

MONS 031701