GE, N.Y. STATE TO SHARE COSTS OF PCB CLEANUP IN HUDSON RIVER

General Electric Co. and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation have agreed to a $7-million program for cleaning up polychlorinated biphenyls in the Hudson River, thereby settling a state legal action against the company for its discharges of PCBs into the Hudson (TMN, June 9, 1976, p. 95). Agreement imposes no penalties on GE and contains no punitive language.

Under agreement, GE and the state each will contribute $3-million to a state-directed program to remedy the Hudson's PCB problem. The program, intended to "revitalize" recreational and commercial fishing in the river, may involve dredging of PCB-contaminated sediments.

GE also has agreed to spend $1-million on research into the problem. Total of $400,000 of that amount will be spent on research and pilot plant studies on removal or treatment of PCBs in water and sediments. Another $400,000 will be spent studying the "environmental compatibility" of the PCB substitute GE will use in electrical capacitors. Company has agreed to stop using PCBs at its two Hudson River capacitor plants by July 1, 1977. The remaining $200,000 will be spent studying environmental impacts of other substances chosen by DEC Commissioner Peter A.A. Berle.

GE also is building a $3.5-million treatment facility which will reduce PCB discharges from its two plants to an average of one gram per day, GE officials said, down from the current average of slightly less than a pound per day. The facility, which is scheduled to be operational by next April, later will be used to control discharges of the PCB substitute and residual PCBs.

Abraham Sofaer, a Columbia University law professor who presided over the state's administrative action against GE, called the agreement "an attractive precedent for dealing with situations of joint culpability." In February, Sofaer ruled that GE discharges had violated state water quality standards, but also that the problem was the result of "regulatory failure" on the part of both Federal and state agencies, (TMN, Feb. 15, 1976, p. 29). The PCB discharges were within limits imposed by Federal permits.

Governor Hugh Carey called the accord "an excellent example of ways that industry and the state can work together."

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MONSANTO DOUBTS CONCLUSIONS OF MOBIL OIL PCB STUDY

Monsanto Co. study of workers employed at the company's PCB manufacturing facility in Sauget, Ill. has turned up no cases of melanoma or pancreatic cancers -- diseases which Mobil Oil Corp. recently said may be caused by PCB exposure (TMN, Sept. 1, 1976, p. 141).

George Roush, director of Monsanto's medical and environmental health department, said that if either disease were related to PCB exposure as Mobil suggested, the malignancies would also be seen in Monsanto's exposed workforce, which is about four times larger than the population studied by Mobil. "In my opinion," Roush said, "the fact that we found no cases of either of these cancers casts strong doubt that the findings of the Mobil study were in fact related to PCB."

The Monsanto information was based on a review of records of more than 300 current and former employes identified as having worked in the Sauget PCB production unit since 1936. An examination of 50 death certificates, however, showed seven cases of lung cancer. That compares with 2.7 cases that would have been expected. Roush said that this finding may be significant and may well not be. What is needed now is a controlled study of the lung cancer cases. Roush said Monsanto would try to determine smoking habits of the seven workers, and also try to characterize the work experience and exposure before and after working for Monsanto. The company also intends to compare the 7 of 50 rate with the lung cancer mortality rate for the area surrounding the Sauget plant. Roush noted that three of the seven worked in Monsanto's PCB for less than three months.

"There are a lot of things we still don't know and the answers could be extremely significant, especially with a sample this small," he said.