

INTERVIEW WITH ALBANY TIMES-UNION - FREDRIC U. DICKER
By Phone 9/9/75

WILLIAMS: Your names, please.

SIMONS: Stuart M. Richel and Dr. Edward L. Simons

WILLIAMS: As I understand it, Dr. Simons, you are here today not to talk power but to discuss PCBs.

SIMONS: That is correct.

WILLIAMS: Let me have a little about your background. Regarding these PCBs, what position do you hold?

SIMONS: I'm the manager of the Environmental Protection Operation.

WILLIAMS: What degree do you have?

SIMONS: Doctor in chemistry.

WILLIAMS: As manager of the Environmental Protection Operation I wonder what you think about the allegation that PCB discharges from the ~~max~~ GE may cause irreparable damages to the Hudson River.

SIMONS: The extent of damage to the Hudson is *derived* from the analyses that have been made by EPA and by DEC of the sediments of the water and of the fish. I am not in a position to judge as to whether these are irreparable or reversible. I can only point out that the discharges that are now ^{emanating} ~~eminating~~ from our plant, the losses of PCBs have been drastically reduced by us in the last few years. At the present time, they are down to well under 5 pounds per day and we had agreed in the discussions we have had here in the past few weeks ^{with} that the Department of Environmental Conservation that we would get these discharges down to about a pound by mid '76. I would like to put this in perspective, ~~we~~ use several thousand gallon of PCBs a day at these plants at Hudson Falls. The amount that is lost in small bits thru various steps of the manufacturing operation, ^{is} when we reach our level of one pound per day, is less than 12 ounces, that is it is less than a soda pop bottle of material - so

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WILLIAMS: Are PCBs in liquid form?

SIMONS: Well they are liquid but the losses do not occur by a direct loss of pure PCBs. What happens is that in addition to the several thousand ^{gallons} ~~thousands~~ of PCBs that we use each day, we also use a million and half of water per day for various operations in the plant and small amounts of these PCBs get into the water that is discharged from the plant. So it is this 1 -and-a-half- million gallons of water that carries these small amounts of PCBs into the river. It is not a dumping, in the sense that we have a barrel which we throw out scrap PCBs.

WILLIAMS: A lot of people don't realize that.

SIMONS: From the way in which this word dumping has been used even in the Sports Illustrated magazine, it is obvious that people either don't understand it or then they are using it for its wrong connotation.

WILLIAMS: Yesterday, in the statement Commissioner Reed made it was ~~xxx~~ suggested that there may be some way to either enumerate or outrightly get rid of PCBs in the river. Do you know of any way to neutralizing whatever PCBs may be in the Hudson?

SIMONS: I do not. I saw the account. I was told that the account in the New York Times, that appeared in the ^{NYC} late city edition did have a statement ~~that~~ to the effect that he was going to convene a meeting of scientists to discuss this problem. I do know that when the Vermont & New York State were having their squabble over the sludge beds in Lake Champlane that was produced from years of operation of International Paper Company, the State of New York was arguing against the State of Vermont, which wanted these sludge beds cleaned out and the argument that the New York State authorities were using was that attempting to clean up these sludge beds would create and disperse the solution to a greater extent.

WILLIAMS: Was that PCB pollution then? Or was that another form of pollution?

SIMONS: Yes, with this particular pollutant, the Tri-County Journal News in Glen Falls.

RICHEL: The problem that Ed is going to speak about now and that he has analogized to the International Paper problem is our concern that interfering with the beds as they may be, the sediment as it now is, may cause greater problems than what now exists. And that problem of stirring up the sediment was discussed in this paper that Ed just mentioned, in an earlier article and it was discussed by one of EPA's chief enforcement officials in N.Y.C. and that was Dr. Ernest Regna. Perhaps Ed could bring you up to date. That fellow's name was Regna.

WILLIAMS: Was that the same as the Lake Champlain situation?

SIMONS:

RIENCK: No sir. I gave the Lake Champlain situation as an example of where New York State claimed itself that this would happen but ~~not~~ with respect to the present problem in the Hudson River. Dr. Regna, who heads up the Permits Branch of EPA's Regional Office in New York, which has jurisdiction over all plants in New York State - he gave an interview to ~~Chap~~ Blakeman of the Tri-County News which appeared on August 11 and he said that the chemical has entered sediment on the River bottom and ^{would} continued to create problems even if no additional amounts were discharged. He said dredging the river would not be feasible because it would stir up the sediment and possibly increase the diffusion of PCB into the water.

WILLIAMS: Do you agree with that analysis?

SIMONS: I have no basis for disagreeing with that - this has been a problem which was also faced when there was the discovery of mercury contamination in many streams and lakes some years back. -- That although it is a potential reservoir for materials, there was no known technology for removing it which would not run the risk of making the contamination more widespread.

WILLIAMS: For past years, ^{as-much-as} the GE has been discharging 50 gallons or more

per day
For past years, the GE has been discharging as much as 50 pounds or more of PCBs in the river. Conceivable, that could still be in the bottom of the river somewhere and if some one went in with a dredging operation you could clear it all out.

SIMONS: That's right. Now I would like to point out with respect to these numbers that have been quoted about the discharges in previous years. We have been manufacturing capacitors ~~up~~ in there for at least 20 years but prior to 1969 there was no body in science, industry, or government, who knew that PCBs were persistent and ubiquitous in the environment for represented ^a hazard and it was only in the beginning of the 1970s that enough evidence had accumulated to suggest that there was a problem and when we began a program to reduce these discharges from the levels that are being quoted of these 50 pounds per day - and as I say, in our efforts in the last few years, now have brought that down to well below 5 pounds and we are confident that by the middle of next year, it will be down to 1 pound or less.

WILLIAMS: Was it your position then, I guess it would be or the GEs, at least at this time in the conceivable future that there would be no way to see the elimination of PCBs discharges?

SIMONS: We have taken the position, two-fold, one is we have changed to a different grade of PCBs which are more readily degraded in the environment than the grade that was used before 1971.

WILLIAMS: How much more readily is it?

SIMONS: Its hard to put a specific number on this but I would say ~~you~~ we're talking about a product which now contains about 99% of this more biodegradable material whereas the earlier substance may have contained less than 90% of the more biodegradable material.

WILLIAMS: When you say a substance, what you are using up there is not a pure PCB?

SIMONS: PCBs are not a pure material, they consist of a mixture of materials of varying degrees of reactivity.

WILLIAMS: What is it used for?

SIMONS: It is used as an insulating fluid in capacitors and in our transformers that we make in Pittsfield and Rome, Georgia. The principle advantage that we get from it is because it is completely nonflammable. If there should be any failure of the equipment with electrical overloads or electrical heating, there is no danger of a failure being followed by a fire and that is something that can be said of no other fluid that has been used in capacitors or has been proposed for use as a substitute for PCBs.

WILLIAMS: Now these fluids are heat transmitters?

SIMONS: Heat transfer and electrical insulating fluid. They serve both functions both electrical insulation and the removal of heat.

WILLIAMS: Do they surround the capacitors?

SIMONS: They surround the - they are inside the field metal case. A capacitor looks very much like a flashlight battery.

_____ I think for your purposes it might be easier to say they are inside and this is a metal aluminum can and inside that are electrical equipment and everything else is filled with PCBs.

DICKER: You mentioned that you are using a better grade of degradable PCBs, is there even still more a better grade of degradable available?

SIMONS: No, the best that is made by Monsanto which is the sole U.S. producer.

DICKER: Is it an expensive chemical?

SIMONS: Yes, I don't know what the exact cost is now but it is probably, I've heard numbers, its in the dollars per gallon, but I don't know the exact figure.

RICHEL: Mr. Dicker I think at this point that it might be well to - it is sufficiently expensive so there would be every economic incentive for the Company to use alternative substances. It is primarily, if not totally true, that the substance is being used because of our concern that there be a non-flammable substance used and our concerns in part, I might say, is that DEC's actions may compel the use of alternative substances in the long run, whose environmental inadequacy is unknown and whose technical adequacy, in terms of nonflammability, will be either inadequate or less satisfactory than PCBs.

DICKER: Do you think GE ~~is-the-only-one-that~~ knows how to do that if they are forced into it?

RICHEL: When you say someone is forced it implies that there aren't many options and very definite.

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DICKER: Suppose they get a court order against -

RICHEL: Well there is a proposed order that is now out and I think it is difficult to say what we would do if that order is finally promulgated as it is now. I can tell you very definitely that we will be participating in the Hearing and what the results will be is unclear.

DICKER: Mr. Richel, are you with the Public Relations?

RICHEL: No, I'm an attorney who works with the Environmental Protection Operation - my title is Environmental Protection - Attorney.

DICKER: I just wondered if GE had given any thought to the possibility of closing this plant, if it had a choice of coming up with an alternative or ceasing its PCBs?
kinds of

RICHEL: Those management decisions are not made by us /

SIMONS: I think that the point that should be kept in mind is the fact that these very expensive reductions that we have already made were made before the Dept. of Environmental Conservation became at least publicly aware that the problem existed. We had a program underway that we have in the weeks that we have been meeting with the Department come to an agreement on all the intermediate steps that are set

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forth in the Order as far as the levels may reach but we don't know ~~xx~~ how to reach the zero discharge. I might say something else with respect to that employment problem. The Company has obviously been very concerned about that. It was made quite clear by representatives of Mr. Reed that there should be ordering of a shutdown of the plant was under active consideration and we were also informed that a shutdown would have disastrous implications for the economy of that area of the state. We learned from the Department of Commerce, I might add, that

TURNED THE TAPE

SIMONS: complete elimination of PCBs down to zero. This is not the kind of equipment of industrial problems in which there is industrial equipment on the shelf, you order it, and use it the way the manufacturer prescribes and you get a prescribed result.

DICKER: What have you been doing so far to get it down to 50 pounds and then in a year down to 1 pound?

SIMONS: The biggest single steps have been to review the imminent details of each of the steps in our manufacturing operation to find all the places from which small amounts of PCBs can be lost to the environment and once the major reductions by major changes in our manufacturing procedures and our long-range program would involve further treatment programs after that but the biggest reductions that have been obtained so far have been thru changes in the manufacturing and processes operations.

DICKER: Why do you take a million and half gallons of water in a day? Is that used for cooling purposes?

SIMONS: For cooling purposes, we have lots of ovens and *pipes* and so forth and they just need cooling.

DICKER: And I guess the potential is always there for a big PCB loss, from pipes that rupture or ---

SIMONS: Yes, we have all of our storage areas are now being diked. The piping is put above grounds so the steps that are necessary to prevent the massive spills are currently in place or being updated.

Our problem is not really the containment of spills, we haven't had any major spills of that nature. Our problem is the drainage of these major losses and a little bit from these various manufacturing stages.

DICKER: I think what you said to me that PCBs accumulated in a fish's body. That's the implication of all of this.

SIMONS: Yes

DICKER: Something like the chlorinated hydrocarbons?

SIMONS: Something like DDT - yes.

DICKER: Do you know if it have to be a gas accumulation or an adsorption of the skin or ----

SIMONS: There is a difference of opinion among the biological authors ^{whose} of papers I've written and there is no clear indications of whether one - either or both mechanisms are in operation.

DICKER: I wonder how individuals at your plants handle PCB affairs - somehow carefully protected against them - with special

SIMONS: The employees have in the decade they have been used only ^{the} health effects that have been observed that were attributable to PCBs were occasional cases of skin irritation or acne and these cleared up when the affected employee was transferred to other non PCB operations.

DICKER: Has the Health Department moved recently to check any of your employees?

SIMONS: I really don't know. I know they have checked the drinking water up there, whether they have done any examinations of employees medical records, I just don't know.

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DICKER: Apparently they have conferred that the drinking water is safe?

SIMONS: Yes, I have that report this afternoon.

DICKER: ONE LAST THING - I wonder if

Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you wanted printed in the story on it?

SIMONS: Just the statement that I made earlier that there is a continuing effort since the environmental espersion of PCBs became known several years ago for the Company to reduce these to the ~~imaxt~~ lowest feasible level. These steps were undertaken before DEC got into the act, and they would have continued if DEC had not banned this order.

DICKER: Have you been served with any papers?

SIMONS: They were served on our plant at Hudson Falls this morning and I expect to see a copy of that tomorrow.

DICKER: Mr. Richel, just let me ask you something. When was it suggested that DEC
REBX might attempt to close your plant down ?

RICHEL: On several occasions.

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RICHEL:

SIMONS: We had a visit by - let me put it this way - I want to make the language clear so as not to misrepresent - the language has been quite expressely this - that the shut-down of our plants was one option under active consideration and it was said to us by the General Counsel, Mr. Hallman on at least one or two occasions I can recall, I didn't record the dates but Ed if you can fill me in---

SIMONS: I can give you the dates - the first meeting at which this was mentioned was a meeting held on August 14 at Hudson Falls and the ranking Department official there is Dr. Theodore Huller, Deputy Commissioner for Planning & Research and he indicated at that meeting that this was one of the options that the Department had open to it. That no decision had been made but that was one of the options under consideration. The following day, which was Friday, August 15, we met at the Department Offices and Dr. Huller was joined at that meeting by Mr. Robert Hallm

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who is the Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel and he too indicated that this was a possible option open to the Department.

DICKER: You haven't heard anything about that since?

SIMONS: That has not been mentioned as a specific option since those times.

RICHEL: I would infer that they are not considering that option now but are instead considering measures which may have the same open impact.

DICKER: What do you base that on?

RICHEL: If indeed, the order that results from the Hearing and subsequent decision making is something in an order with which the Company can not comply then some consideration will have to be made on our part to ~~maxi~~ options at our own - and one of those options would by definition be what do we do if we can't comply?

DICKER: Do you know if there are states in this area or around the country that are permitting discharges at a higher level than what is going into the Hudson?

RICHEL: There are numerous states - The Federal government under the Water Pollution Control Act has been issuing permits to many plants for many company's involved in the manufacture of transformers and capacitors. There is no condition within any of those permits, to my knowledge, which presently requires a complete elimination of the discharge of PCBs. The conditions being placed into these other permits, at least in part, recognize one - the continuing need for the use of PCBs and two the technical limitations on the control of discharge of PCBs. What this proposed order does is to say eliminate it although we don't know how you are going to do it.

DICKER: I would like to thank you both for your time and perhaps if I do have any further questions, I can get back to you?

RICHEL & SIMONS: Sure

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