Pollutant may cause cancer, other diseases

Cancer, vomiting, liver disturbances, jaundice, spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, skin changes, abnormaleye discharges, acne-like lesions are all human maladies that health officials believe are, or may be, caused by polychlorinated biphenyls, a type of pollution now widely found in the Hudson River and other state waters.

Federally set guidelines view fish with more than 5 parts per million of PCBs in their flesh as hazardous. Recently released state and federal reports have found fish with PCBs in the hundreds of parts per million in state waters, hence the recently announced EnCon recommendation not to consume any Hudson River fish.

At present, PCBs are primarily used as an insulating fluid in electrical and heat transfer equipment, such as the capacitors and transformers manufactured at GE's Fort Edward and Hudson Falls Plants.

According to a report from the federal Environmental Protection Agency, it was not until 1966 that PCBs started to be viewed as potentially dangerous substances.

Until recently, the report notes, PCBs have been used in paper coatings, carbonless carbon paper, plastics, inks, paints, and hydraulic fluids. But when the first laboratory results started indicating a potential hazard, the country's only manufacturer of PCBs, Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Co., voluntarily agreed to restrict sales to manufacturers of "closed electrical systems," such as the GE products, where accidental discharges are believed unlikely.

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