Sept. 17, 1975

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Sea pollution laid to GE

Hudson River perils fisheries: Encon

By FREDRIC U. DICKER

Pollutants spilling into the Hudson River from General Electric Co. plants in Washington County and possibly from other sources may be contaminating Atlantic Ocean fishing grounds and coastal areas as far south as North Carolina, The Times-Union has learned.

And the state's chief environmental officer says he has ordered an investigation to learn why top officials in the state Environmental Conservation Department were not alerted to the danger by lower-level department employes who knew as long ago as five years that the GE plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward were polluting the river with polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs.

Additionally, Environmental Conservation Commissioner Ogden R. Reid told The Times-Union:

— Initial tests have indicated that "substantial amounts" of PCB pollution are in the Mohawk River, the St. Lawrence Seaway and Lake Ontario, and:

— He may ban within a week the sale of Chinook Salmon taken from Lake Ontario as well as Hudson River eels.

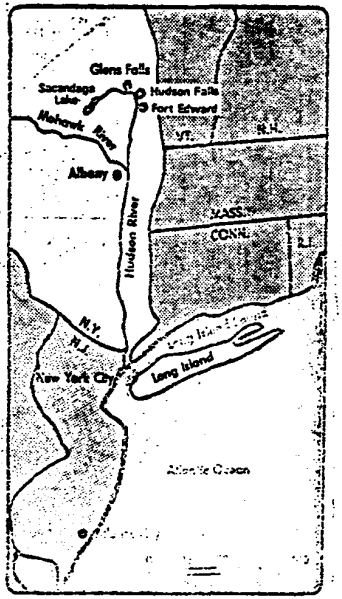
PCBs are industrial chemicals which are suspected of being able to cause serious illness in humans, including cancer.

Reid's investigation is necessary, he said, because "a substantial amount of information" warning of the accumulation of PCBs in the Hudson was compiled by EnCon personnel but was never "brought to the sixth floor," the location of the commissioner's office at 50 Wolf Road, Colonie.

Reid, who last week urged persons not to consume fish from the Hudson because of the discharges, said his department began a strong effort to stop pollution by PCBs after receiving an alert from the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

IN A MEMORANDUM forwarded to EnCon in early July by EPA, the state was warned that PCB pollution in the Hudson may be the worst in the nation.

See PCBs, Page A-6



Scientists tracing pollutants from General Electric plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward have found evidence of contamination in the Atlantic Ocean off New Jersey.

Pcb New York

MONS 033524

PCBs may befoul Atlantic Ocean: U.S.

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"Our field investigation in the Hudson has revealed the largest source of PCBs flowing into an aquatic source that I know of. The combined effluents the GE facilities are discharging approximate 40 pounds per day of PCBs into the Hudson River. This is in contrast to an estimated total loading of all streams in the state of Wisconsin into Lake Michigan, at approximately 8 pounds per day," stated the memorandum prepared by Dr. Gilman Veith of the National Water Quality Laboratory in Duluth, Michigan.

GE officials, who have been directed by Reid to stop all PCB discharges by next September, contend only about 5 pounds per day are being discharged into the Hudson. However, they concede the amount had been much higher, even as recently as last spring.

A study of the extent of PCB pollution in New York conducted by The Times-Union revealed the following:

— Hudson River pollution may have traveled well into the Atlantic Ocean and affected important commercial fishing areas. State and federal agencies are now checking fish, water, fowl, and sediments along New York's Atlantic coast, Long Island Sound, lower New York Bay, and the New Jersey shoreline.

A spokesman for EPA said "the fishery involved extends from Massachusetts to North Carolina. It is endangered by the PCBs found in the Hudson and we are concerned about the fact that the chemical seems to concentrate in higher and higher organisms, as they go up the food chain."

— At least six agencies and hundreds of employes are now giving maximum effort to determine the full scope of PCB pollution and its potential dangers. Agencies involved include EnCon, EPA, the federal Food and Drug Administration, the state Health Department, and the federal National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

— Reid reported the full extent of PCB contamination appears to be much broader than originally realized. "The airmeasure to be involved as a transmission mechanism for PCBs, carrying the discharges from some of the plants using PCBs," he stated.

Also, Reid reported studies just brought to his attention reveal snow can be a PCB carrier and that many game birds in New York, including several varieties of ducks and woodcock, were found to have PCB levels higher than the legal limit permitted for commercially sold poultry.

— The PCB problem will now become for the foreseeable future a major on-going EnCon concern. "This could become the work of decades," Reid stated.

— EnCon will seek a "substantial" increase in expenditures for laboratory research and field investigation into the PCB problem in its next budget. In addition, a sizable share of revenues received as the result of recent increase in hunting and fishing license fees are to be earmarked for PCB efforts.

— Although he is on record stating GE should be forced to contribute to the cost of a PCB clean-up, Reid conceded talks with leading environmentalists offered little hope such a clean-up is possible.

After meeting with about 40 specialists late last week, Reid said the only hopeful avenue for ridding water bodies of PCBs was through the use of certain types of aquatic plants which absorb the chemicals. However, the plants would then have to be removed from the waters, a massive, and probably impossible, undertaking.

— Donald Bliss, an EPA spokesman, reported his agency was now rechecking all permits for commercial discharges into the Hudson River to see if some industries which claimed no PCB dumping had lied.

— Dr. Ernest Regan, chief of the water facility branch of EPA's New York office, said "it is possible" the PCB removal of an unused Niagara-Mohawk Power Company dam in the area of the two GE plants, which released millions of pounds of sludge into the lower Hudson, contributed substantially to the river's PCB levels.



GOOD CATCH, BAD FISH — Richard Gail of Albany shows the great lock he had fishing for striped bass in the Hudson River last week. However, Gail, a member of the Arbor Hill Rod and Gun Club and the Bass Fisherman's Association, said he would not eat the normally delicious fish because of warnings issued by the Environmental Conservation Department. (Staff photo by Arnold LaFevre)

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