ITHACA, N. Y.
JOURNAL
D. 17,500

SEP 9 1975

Say Hudson's Water OK to Drink

ALBANY (AP)—Drinking water from the Hudson River has been declared fit for human consumption.

The declaration came Monday from the state Health Department. It followed by one day a complaint from the state Department of Environmental Conservation that the General Electric Co. may have irreparably damaged the 306-mile river by dumping toxic wastes into its waters for more than two decades.

On Sunday, Ogden Reid, the state's environmental conservation commissioner, warned New Yorkers against eating any fish taken from the Hudson which runs from a small Adirondack Mountain lake to New York City where it enters the Atlantic.

The complaint's allegation focused on the dumping of a toxic chemical called polychlorinated byphenlys (PCB) from General Electric plants in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls.

General Electric officials said the company discontinued four years ago dumping the type of PCB found recently in Hudson River fish.

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On Monday, the concern over possible PCB contamination spread throughout the state. The state Health and Labor departments were cooperating in an investigation of the health of industrial workers exposed to the chemical.

According to the Health Department, the health of workers at six industrial plants would be examined. The plants were identified as the General Electric plants at Fort Edward and Hudson Falls; the Niagara Transformer Corp. in Buffalo; York Capacitor Corp. in Brooklyn; R. F. Interonics in Bayshore, Long Island; Axel Electronics in Jamaica, and Universal Voltronics in Mt. Krisco.

Reid also warned against eating lake trout and brown trout taken from Lake Ontario. High levels of PCB were also reported in fish from Lake Champlain, according to state and federal officials.

The departmental complaint issued by Reid seeks an order requiring General Electric to reduce daily PCB discharges to two pounds by the end of the year and to eliminate the discharges entirely by the end of 1976.

Company officials claimed they were willing to work toward a daily discharge of three-quarters of a pound. General Electric officials also said the company's two plants discharge less than five pounds of PCB daily. Federal law allows the company to discharge between 30 and 40 pounds a day. Earlier this year, the federal Environmental Protection Agency directed the company to limit its daily PCB discharge to four ounces by May 31, 1977. But that order was suspended pending a hearing.

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In Washington, a federal health official called upon the Environmental Protection Agency to order an immediate halt to the dumping of PCB into the Hudson.

"Such action would be in the best interests of protection of the public health and safety by eventually terminating PCB entry into the food chain and subsequent exposure to the American people," said Theodore Cooper, assistant secretary of health in the Department of Health Education and Welfare.

PCB is a "suspected cancercausing chemical," according to Cooper. Other federal officials have said PCB is fatal to fish eggs, may cause liver cancer in rats and can cause weight and hair loss in monkeys. Its effect on humans is still under study.

The chemical is used in manufacturing electrical equipment, as well as plastics, paints, sealants, caulking compounds, cutting oils and heat transfer and hydraulic fluids, federal officials said.

Recent fish samplings taken near the two General Electric Plants found concentrations of the chemical greatly exceeding the five parts per million standard set by the federal government as the limit for human consumption, state officials said.

But water samples taken from 11 drinking water supplies from the Hudson and Mohawk rivers showed PCB concentrations well below federal standards for human consumption, state health officials said Monday.

"The latest sampling shows there is no hazard from PCB in drinking water," according to Robert P. Whalen, state health commissioner.

Samples from water supplies were taken in Waterford, Cohoes, Latham, Dutchess and Ulster counties, Port Ewen, Rhinebeck and Fort Edward, the health department said.

An Oct. 6 hearing date has been set for Reid's complaint against General Electric. Reid has also asked that civil penalties be assessed against the company and that the firm be required to post a $5 million minimum compliance bond.

MONS 032764