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Environmental Leaders Attack PCB Remarks

By JIM DETJEN
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Mid-Hudson area environmental leaders sharply criticized state Commerce Commissioner John Dyson Friday for his statements Wednesday that PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) regulation should be left up to the federal government.

Terms such as "opportunistic", "irresponsible", "despicable" and "uneducated" were typically used to describe Dyson's comments that the state Department of Environmental Conservation should abruptly end its hearings on PCB contamination of the Hudson River. The state DEC has brought suit against the General Electric Co. in an effort to halt the company's discharge of the toxic industrial chemical into the Hudson by Sept. 30, 1976.

Dyson's uneducated comments are nothing short of despicable," said Clearwater People's Pipewatch director John Harris-Cronin. "Dyson has jumped on the PCB's bandwagon solely for political reasons. His comments are entirely out of line."

Dyson called a press conference Wednesday to say that "New York cannot afford to take the lead" in solving problems such as PCB's pollution. He said he had been informed that if the company were required to halt its pollution by this September, the General Electric plants at Hudson Falls and Fort Edward could be forced to shut down resulting in the potential loss of 1,200 jobs.

Joseph Lombardi, the recently-elected chairman of the county legislature's environmental control committee termed Dyson's comments "unfortunate." "It is clear that

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Dyson doesn't understand the full potential of the danger of PCB pollution," Lombardi said. "One of the functions of government is to protect the life and liberty of its citizens. And I think it is very clear now that PCB's represent a clear and present danger in the Hudson River."

Norman Van Valkenburgh, the newly appointed regional director of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, said in an interview in his New Paltz office that Dyson has failed to consider the impact PCB pollution has had on destroying jobs. "The Hudson River fishery was once an important industry for the region. Yet because of industrial pollution such as PCB's the river's fishing industry has gone all to hell," he said. "The role of DEC is to protect the environment and health of the region and that is what we are trying to do."

Harris-Cronin, who has been involved in documenting evidence of PCB pollution in the Hudson River, said the issue of losing jobs is a facade. "Tuck Industries in Beacon said they would close down if they were forced to comply with environmental regulations," he said. "Well, they pleaded guilty to 12 counts of violating water pollution statutes and are now being forced to comply with the law. And I think it is evident that Tuck Industries has not had to close up shop."

Mike Rosenthal, the new chairman of the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council, said he believed Dyson's comments were irresponsible. "It is clear that he just doesn't understand how dangerous a substance PCB's are. In the New York Times article today Dyson admitted he had not read all of the hearing testimony or the scientific literature on the subject. Well how can he responsibly make the statements he has?" said Rosenthal, who is a professor of chemistry at Bard College.

David Seymour, the president of the Hudson River Fishermen's Association, said Dyson's comments were "insensitive" because he knew that Environmental Conservation Commissioner Ogden Reid could not comment on a hearing now in process. Seymour also declined further comment, because of his association's role in the case, and said he would await the outcome of the hearing.

Harris-Cronin was strongly critical of Dyson's minimizing the danger of PCB's in Poughkeepsie's drinking water. "Already the levels of PCB's in the city's drinking water supplies are so great that the city may not even meet the proposed water quality regulations of the Environmental

Protection Agency," he said. "In Poughkeepsie the health of thousands of people are at stake. Numerous scientists have testified that PCB's are a significant health hazard. How can Dyson be so uneducated?"

Harris-Cronin said Dyson completely ignored the danger of PCB's when he was commissioner of Agriculture and Markets. "Dyson's motivations are purely political. General Electric has the money to halt PCB pollution if it wants to," he said. "But they are refusing to do so and consequently endangering the health of thousands of people. And Dyson is playing exactly into GE's hands."