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$500-million suit...

...Property owners hit GE, Monsanto

Businessmen, property owners and fishermen in Rome have filed a $500-million lawsuit against [redacted] and the [redacted] charging that they polluted the Coosa River.

The class action suit, filed in the Atlanta U.S. District Court, charges General Electric with poisoning fish by "willfully, wontently, negligently or recklessly" allowing and causing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) to enter into a tributary of the Coosa River.

PCBs are used in the manufacture of electronic components and can cause skin eruptions, excessive eye discharges and swelling of eyelids.

Named as plaintiffs in the suit are Henry Tucker, commercial fisherman and owner of Tucker Brothers Marina, Alabama Road; Robert Cantille, Bass Pro Shop; J.W. Itson, Coosa Bait and Fish Shop, Alabama Road; Margaret Rhinehart, owner of a fish and supply outlet on Alabama Road; Gordon May, Lock and Dam Bait Shop; Mike Souder, resident of Lake Weiss; Ralph Land, commercial fisherman; Hollis Taylor, commercial fisherman, Homer Ison, commercial fisherman, Carlton Zack Walker and Shirley J. Walker Jr.

Monsanto Co. said the chemical to General Electric, the suit says.

Two weeks ago state officials ordered a halt to commercial fishing in the river because the fish contained levels of PCBs above the limit recommended for human consumption by the federal Food [redacted] and Drug Administration.

A spokesman for General Electric denied the firm was responsible for the fish contamination, saying that since GE still uses PCBS, it is a "natural) target for anyone" who wants to file suit.

The use of PCBs has been restricted in recent years, but "until 1972, there were any number of uses of PCB," Buchanan said. "It was used in lubricating oil that might have been disposed of and ultimately found its way into the water system."

William C. Lanham, an Atlanta attorney representing the plaintiffs who are from both Georgia and Alabama, said he will attempt to prove that Monsanto did not fully inform General Electric of the dangers of PCB.

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