G.E. Witness Concedes Errors In His Data on PCB in Hudson

By RICHARD SEVERO
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ALBANY, Dec. 9—A principal expert witness for General Electric conceded today that there had been errors, omissions and reporting confusion in the data he presented about levels of PCB in fish in the Hudson River.

The witness, Dr. Gerald Lauer, vice president of Ecological Analysts Inc., a consulting concern of Middletown, N. Y., conceded at a hearing that there had been confusion over the kinds of fish tested, precisely where they had been caught, how they were labeled and what levels of PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, they contained.

"I got most of my data over the telephone," Dr. Lauer said at one point.

Yesterday, however, Dr. Lauer told the hearing that his investigation showed much lower levels of the toxic chemical in fish than previously indicated by witnesses for the state Department of Environmental Conservation. The department, which covered the hearings, has accused General Electric of violating the state's water quality standards by discharging PCB into the river from two capacitor plants north of Albany.

3-Month Sampling

Dr. Lauer, a biologist who frequently works for utility companies and other industrial concerns, has sampled fish near the two plants over the last three months and felt the average concentrations of PCB in the edible portions of the fish were well below requirements established by the United States Food and Drug Administration.

At present, the F.D.A. has set a maximum allowable limit of five parts per million in fish, although the agency has indicated that it is considering adopting a lower level.

There were long pauses in today's hearing as both Dr. Lauer and Philip Gitlen, counsel for the state environmental agency, scrutinized Dr. Lauer's control sheets, which were written in his own hand on yellow paper. The fish collected by Dr. Lauer and his associates had been analyzed by Woodson-Tenent Laboratories of Memphis, which had mailed some data to Dr. Lauer and given him more on the telephone over this past weekend.

But under cross-examination by Mr. Gitlen, Dr. Lauer conceded that the photocopies of some laboratory work were too dim to read, but that he had not double checked the data with Woodson-Tenent.

Moreover, he conceded that PCB levels in several fish were dramatically higher than the F.D.A. limits—86, 75, 112.1 and 143.2 parts per million, in four samples.

In another instance, Mr. Gitlen indicated that a decimal point was misplaced, so that on the laboratory data card a fish was reported as having 7.25 parts per million of PCB, whereas on Dr. Lauer's control sheets, it was reported as .725 parts per million. Dr. Lauer said that he did not know which one was correct.

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