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Auction demanded to curb PCB pollution

By CHAT BLAKEMAN

HUDSON FALLS — Two environmental groups have urged the government to take "emergency" action against General Electric and other Hudson River polluters.

In a letter to Russell Train, head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Hudson River Fisherman's Association said GE and other firms were discharging the toxic chemical PCB in quantities endangering fish and aquatic life.

"It is now almost impossible to catch fish in the Hudson which can be considered safe to eat under existing Food and Drug Administration (FDA) limits," the letter said.

To date the EPA has said it cannot act against the polluters because existing contracts already regulate the amount of PCB which can be contained in their discharges. The GE permit, calls for the company to reduce its discharge of PCB from its current level of approximately two pounds a day to a number of ounces by 1977.

There have been unconfirmed reports that the state Department of Environmental Protection may step in and institute tougher guidelines, however, Commissioner Ogden Reid has said he would like to see the discharge eliminated entirely.

It was also DEC, acting with the state Department of Health, which issued the warning earlier this month advising consumers not to eat striped bass from the river and to limit their consumption of other species to one meal a week.

There have also been reports that Reid is upset that warnings about the chemical made several years ago did not result in stricter action by the state.

In their letter to Train, the two groups said that more than 80 per cent of the fish sampled near the Tappen Zee Bridge contained PCB levels in excess of the FDA's limit of five parts per million.

In addition to striped bass, samples of perch, pickerel, small-mauth bass and shiner minnows have been found to contain levels above the FDA limit.

The issue has attracted national attention, with an article in this week's edition of Sports Illustrated charging that EPA officials failed to act when the matter was first brought to their attention several years ago.

"Scientists in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have been aware of the PCB menace for several years, but the bureaucrats in charge of EPA have dithered and dallied rather than take effective action," the article states.

The chemical, shorthand for polychlorinated biphenyl, is the subject of several research projects now underway. In one test it was found PCB had a cancer-producing effect "of a very low order" when fed to rats over a lifetime.

In another test, Dr. James Allen of the University of Wisconsin Medical School found PCB caused redness of skin, facial swelling and irregularity in the menstrual cycles of monkeys fed regularly with a diet containing 2.5 to 300 perts per million of the chemical.

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