STATE OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12233
OGDEN REID, COMMISSIONER

FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE, THURSDAY, AUGUST 7, 1975

Commissioner of Environmental Conservation Ogden Reid today advised against eating fish taken from the Hudson River, particularly long-lived fish such as striped bass and largemouth bass.

The advisory was issued by Commissioner Reid on the basis of sampling and testing of Hudson River fish which showed concentrations of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in excess of a level of 5 parts per million (ppm) set by the Federal Food and Drug Administration as acceptable for human consumption. Recent sampling in the Hudson showed that better than half the fish tested were over the acceptable limit with high concentrations above the Troy Dam and still excessive concentrations down to the Tappan Zee Bridge.

"It appears we have a serious problem throughout the Hudson and, based on my discussions with Federal officials a national problem as well," Commissioner Reid said.

Commissioner Reid said the Department of Environmental Conservation is taking the following specific actions:

One -- meeting with representatives of General Electric Corporation and other users of PCBs to reach the Department's zero discharge goal.

Two -- requesting Monsanto Chemical, of St. Louis, Missouri, sole manufacturer of PCBs in the United States, to identify all manufacturers in New York State using PCBs.

Three -- undertaking a Statewide water monitoring program which will include Great Lakes, Long Island Sound, the Hudson River and other major waterways.

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Four -- sampling of fish in commercial markets, with joint testing with the Federal FDA laboratory in Brooklyn.

Commissioner Reid discussed the PCBs problem with Federal Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Russell Train and Sherwin Gardner, Acting Administrator, Food and Drug Administration.

Commissioner of Health, Robert P. Whalen joined with Commissioner Reid in the warning on striped bass and further urged that people limit consumption of other species of Hudson River fish. He based his judgment on National FDA policy forbidding the sale of fish containing more than 5 ppm of PCBs and limited information available on human health effects.

"There is no public health emergency, and we do not believe that medical attention is warranted at this time for persons having consumed Hudson River fish in moderation," Dr. Whalen said. "The safest course for the public to protect health is to consume no more than one serving of Hudson River fish per week with the exception of striped bass because of higher levels in these fish on initial testing. Until further information is available striped bass should be avoided."

Dr. Whalen reported that Health Department measurements of PCBs concentrations in Hudson River waters indicated levels which are not a hazard to residents in the vicinity of the River, or to using water supplies taken from the River.

Commissioner Reid said D.E.C. has been advised by Dr. Donald Healton, Regional Director of FDA's Upper Mid-West Region, that FDA as a matter of national policy seizes all fish in interstate commerce containing more than 5 ppm PCBs and has seized numerous shipments from Lake Michigan containing excessive accumulations of PCBs. The Commissioner also said he has been advised that Wisconsin and Minnesota have barred sale of fish with excessive accumulations.

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Recent analyses by D.E.C. of largemouth bass taken from the Cornwall area of the Hudson have revealed concentrations of 11-14 ppms. Concentrations averaging 6 ppm and in one instance measuring 37 ppm have been found in striped bass collected in the vicinity of the Tappan Zee Bridge, the Commissioner added.

Limited analyses done recently by D.E.C. on striped bass taken off Long Island have not shown PCB concentrations over permissible FDA limits, but additional testing will be done there as part of a statewide sampling program to identify the impact of contamination upon fish in all major waterways, Commissioner Reid said. He said the sampling program in the Hudson is being expanded in cooperation with the Region 2 Office of the Federal EPA.

High concentrations of PCBs -- 78 ppm in a shiner, a specie of minnow, and 350 ppm in a rock bass -- have also been measured by EPA in fish taken from the Hudson River in the vicinity of Fort Edward and Hudson Falls where General Electric has two manufacturing units which are major users of PCBs.

D.E.C. officials have been advised by General Electric that it has undertaken a series of remedial steps, based on a consultant's report, which have materially reduced PCBs discharges. General Electric has also advised the Department it is considering additional operational changes as well as plant alterations in an effort to reduce discharges as low as feasible to meet D.E.C.'s goal of zero discharge.

A waste discharge permit issued to General Electric by EPA has set a PCBs daily discharge limit of 3 1/2 ounces by June 30, 1977. General Electric has requested a review of conditions in the permit to review the technical feasibility and the time needed to meet the requirements. Additional meetings of Federal and State officials with representatives of General Electric will be held within a month to examine means of complying with the permit conditions.

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The only manufacturer of PCBs in the United States is the Monsanto Chemical Company of St. Louis, Missouri. To date, Monsanto has resisted requests by the D.E.C. and the EPA for information on its sales in New York State.

PCBs are presently used for "closed" systems, such as for insulating purposes in transformers and capacitators.

Formerly, they were used extensively in paper products, plastics and paints. Such uses were discontinued in 1971 because these materials are long-lived. They persist in garbage dumps, landfills and river bottoms and are an on-going source of contamination of the State's waters through discard and recycling of paper goods.

PCBs are closely related mixtures of chemicals which are comprised of two aromatic (benzene) units which have high amounts of chlorine. The fat-soluble PCBs are heavier than water and are combined tightly to sediments on the river bottom, rather than being freely soluble in water.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CALL:
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