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Hearing due on PCBs

New York state's Dept. of Environmental Conservation has ordered General Electric to reduce discharges of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the Hudson River to 2 lbs./day by December and to zero by September 1976. The department will hold a hearing on the order Oct. 6.

GE, which says it is now discharging less than 5 lbs./day and can reach 0.75 lb./day by the end of 1976, insists there is no feasible way of getting down to zero. The state says that fish in the river have been found to contain far over the 5 parts per million of PCBs allowed by the Food and Drug Administration and has cautioned against eating any fish from the river. GE contends that the grade of PCBs found in the contaminated fish is different from the grade it uses.

PCBs are persistent in the environment and have been linked to cancer. Monsanto, sole U.S. producer, limited sales five years ago to insulating fluids or hermetically sealed devices and says this restriction halved its PCB sales. EPA has asked Dow Chemical and Dow Corning for information on PCB substitutes they have developed.