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G.E. Testifies on PCB-Discharge Cuts

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ALBANY, Dec. 8—The General Electric Company indicated today that it could limit its discharges of toxic PCB's into the Hudson River to 3½ ounces a day by June 1, 1977, but that it still felt that the zero discharge ordered by the State Department of Environmental Conservation for next Sept. 30 was not feasible. At present, the company said, it discharges about two pounds a day into the river.

General Electric's Dr. Edward L. Simons, told an administrative hearing that even though the company had developed what it calls "a highly satisfactory substitute" for the use of PCBs in capacitors, PCB's were still the chemicals of choice.

Sarah Chasis, a lawyer for the Natural Resources Defense Council, a national group, questioned Dr. Simons about a flyer issued by General Electric for Econol, a compound suggested as a substitute for PCB's "where the use of polychlorinated biphenyls is undesirable or prohibited."

Dr. Simons replied that the general nonflammability characteristics of PCB's were superior to the substitute and therefore applicable to a wider variety of capacitors. A statement distributed at the hearing by the company said General Electric was testing alternatives to PCB's but that none had yet been found that were as satisfactory with regard to fire prevention.

The hearing was called by the Department of Environmental Conservation, which alleges that General Electric is violating the state's water-quality standards by discharging PCB's —polychlorinated biphenyls— from two capacitor plants at Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, about 50 miles north of Albany.

According to the United States Food and Drug Administration, fish samples taken from the Hudson River at Poughkeepsie—more than 100 miles south of the discharge—have the highest PCB levels of any fish tested in the country. Fish tested by state and Federal researchers in other New York waterways have also shown levels in excess of five parts per million, currently regarded as the maximum allowable limit in this country.

PCB's, in industrial use for 45 years, have caused liver cancer and reproductive failures in laboratory animals. Workers using PCB's in production tasks have complained of skin infections, nausea, dizziness, eye and nasal irritation, asthmatic bronchitis and fungus infections.

PCB's are a group of chemicals containing varying percentages of chlorine, General Electric's two capacitor plants currently rely mostly on Aroclor 1016, which is more than 41 percent chlorine. General Electric contends that Aroclor 1016 is more biodegradable and thus more desirable from an environmental and public-health view than Aroclors used previously.

However, a representative of the Monsanto Industrial Chemicals Company, W. B. Papageorge, testified that Monsanto had never contended that Aroclor 1016 was less toxic—only that it biodegraded more rapidly. Monsanto is the sole manufacturer of PCB's in the United States.

When questioned by Philip Gitlen, counsel for the Department of Environmental Conservation, Dr. Simons described the manufacturing process in which capacitors are impregnated with PCBs when they are placed in a chamber that is then flooded with the chemical.

Dr. Simons said that to the best of his recollection the rinse water was discharged into the Hudson until last June.

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