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Carey aides battle over environment

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ALBANY — Top Carey Administration officials are engaged in a serious contest over whether jobs or the environment shall be given top priority, and the indications are that the environment is taking a back seat.

On two issues — control of discharges of highly-toxic PCBs into the Hudson River and regulations to implement the new State Environmental Quality Review Act — Gov. Hugh Carey, through his intent, appears to be signaling his subordinates to back off, at least temporarily, from actions that may further discourage industry.

Last Friday, a story leaked to the New York Times, probably by Acting State Commerce Commissioner John Dyson, who has been Carey's point man on the economic issue, indicated that Carey would overrule Environmental Conservation Commissioner Ogden R. Reid on whether to bar entirely PCB discharges by the General Electric Corp.

Parts of the story were faulty, however, and in an official statement issued later Carey had to back down. But he cautioned that the environmental standards in New York would have to bear "a reasonable relationship to the policies of the rest of the nation," thereby telegraphing his intent.

Although they have gotten less attention than the PCBs issue, the environmental review regulations now being weighed by the Department of Environmental Conservation will do far more in the long run to shape the quality of life in the state through the beginning of the 21st Century.

The review law, backed by Carey, unexpectedly passed both houses of the legislature and was signed into law last year, galvanizing startled industry forces into a full-scale attack on the proposed regulations to implement the law, which are key to its operation. In short, the law requires all government agencies to assess the impact of their actions, including granting permits to developers or actions that would tend to induce growth, on the environment.

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