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GE reported offering to negotiate PCB pact

ALBANY — General Electric board chairman Reginald V. Jones has expressed an interest in reaching a negotiated settlement of the dispute involving GE's discharge of toxic PCB into the Hudson River above Albany, according to a New York State official.

State Commerce Commissioner John S. Dyson said this week that on Tuesday he received a call from Jones on the matter. That was the same day a state hearing officer released a report in which he ruled that GE had violated two state laws by discharging PCB into the Hudson.

The hearing officer, Columbia University law professor Abraham D. Sofaer, said he would convene another hearing shortly to determine what damages ought to be assessed against GE and how the PCB pollution might be alleviated.

However, according to Dyson, Jones expressed an interest in negotiating a settlement prior to the new hearings. A GE spokesman at corporate headquarters in Fairfield, Conn. would neither confirm nor deny the Jones conversation.

GE has claimed that if it is forced to reduce PCB discharge to zero — as state Environmental Commissioner Ogden Reid has recommended — GE might be forced to close two plants north of Albany and lay off 1,200 workers.

Position criticized

Dyson has been highly critical of Reid's position, claiming a substantial reduction in PCB discharge but not to zero, would be adequate. His position has been supported by Gov. Hugh Carey.

The discovery of high concentrations of PCB in fish taken from the Hudson prompted a nationwide study of the PCB problem that revealed high concentrations in fish in the Housatonic River in Berkshire County as well.

The GE plants north of Albany and in Pittsfield use PCB, contained in an insulating fluid known as Pyranol, in the manufacture of closed electrical equipment, capacitors and transformers.

The company maintains there is no suitable substitute fluid that provides the necessary insulation and at the same time is nonflammable. Therefore, the company says, it must use PCB in equipment slated for installation in congested areas in order to reduce the risk of fire.

In Pittsfield, the company in the last four years has reduced its discharge of PCB by using a high-intensity incinerator. The company maintains that the only PCB reaching the Housatonic now — about one-quarter pound daily — is from the residue of 40 years of use that has built up in pipes, drains and the soil. In New York the company has said it can attain a one-quarter pound standard by mid-1977.

PCB has been blamed for deforming skin diseases in Japan and the failure of reproductive systems of laboratory animals in the United States.

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