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Water Contamination Study Being Conducted in State

By NANCY PAPPAS

A joint federal-state effort is under way in Connecticut to discover whether the state's waterways are being contaminated by toxic industrial chemicals known as PCBs.

The program was prompted by disclosures that a General Electric (GE) plant in New York had discharged enough of the chemicals to contaminate fish in the Hudson River.

New York officials announced Monday that GE had violated that state's water quality standards, but they did not specify what action, if any, they would take against the which has its headquarters in Fairfield.

PCBs—polychlorinated biphenyls—are known to cause skin lesions, reproductive failures and liver cancer in laboratory animals.

They are believed to become more concentrated as they move up the food chain similar to the now-outlawed pesticide DDT, resulting in high concentrations in larger fish, the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) says.

The highest concentration of PCBs recorded in Connecticut came from a striped bass taken from Long Island Sound last year said a DEP spokesman. It contained 5.7 parts per million of PCBs, exceeding the federal standard of five parts per million.

The DEP reported that yearly samples of shellfish taken from coastal waters show levels no higher than .2 parts per million.

A more complete fish testing program is under way at the state Health Department, with final results expected in about a week. Tests are already complete on fish taken from the Niantic River and show concentrations well below the federal standard, said Robert B. Taylor, director of water compliance for the DEP.

Taylor said the DEP also is testing sediment from the Park River in Hartford, Still River in Danbury and the Quinnipiac River near Meriden. PCBs were found, during routine sampling, in all three rivers. Taylor explained that PCBs "drop out" of flowing water rapidly and become trapped in bottom sediments where they are taken up by small organisms.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will survey state industries to uncover any unsuspected users of PCBs. The EPA banned use of the chemical in 1971 except in the manufacture of certain electrical components.

The only known user of PCBs in Connecticut is the Universal Manufacturing Corp. in Bridgeport, where traces of the chemical have been found in discharged water, DEP said. The EPA is conducting further testing of the plant's water intake and discharge.

EPA is also checking landfills, drinking water supplies and some town incinerators for possible PCB contamination.

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