



NEWS

NYS DEC
50 Wolf Road
Albany, NY 12233-1020
<http://www.dec.state.ny.us>

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

George E. Pataki, Governor

Erin M. Crotty, Commissioner

For Release: IMMEDIATE
Monday, April 2, 2001

Contact: Jennifer Post
(518) 457-

5400

DEC: MAMMALS, SOIL NEAR HUDSON RIVER HAVE ELEVATED PCB LEVELS **Preliminary Findings Indicate River PCBs May Be Affecting Wildlife**

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Erin M. Crotty today announced that findings from preliminary studies of the Upper Hudson River Valley show elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in flood plain soils and mammals that live near the river.

The studies were conducted by DEC in association with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of a Natural Resource Damages Assessment (NRDA) for PCB contamination of the Hudson River. The preliminary results indicate wild mink and river otters have been exposed to PCBs and have elevated levels of PCBs in their bodies. These mammals primarily eat fish and other aquatic life. In addition, flood plain soils and shrews in the upper Hudson River also showed high levels of PCBs.

"The studies indicating high levels of PCB concentrations in soils and animals near the Hudson River raise concerns about the health of wildlife in these areas resulting from the river's contamination," Commissioner Crotty said. "The existence of PCBs in the upper Hudson River basin could have negative impacts beyond aquatic life as a result of exposure passed through the food chain. DEC will continue to screen mammals for PCB contamination and will work with various State and federal agencies to develop appropriate programs to address these findings."

Preliminary trends indicated by the study show the average PCB levels in river otters that live within 10 kilometers of the Upper Hudson River is 172 parts per million (ppm). The levels for mink trapped in areas within one kilometer of the river average 33 ppm. River otters primarily eat fish and other aquatic animals, while mink eat a variety of animals, including fish. Muskrats tested for PCBs showed low levels of PCB contamination, ranging from non-detectable to 2.8 ppm. In contrast to river otters and mink, muskrats primarily eat vegetation.

The results are comparable to those of the last Hudson River mink survey, conducted by DEC from 1982-84. The PCB levels also are similar to concentrations found in fish in the Hudson River, which have not dropped significantly since the mid-1980s.

Based on scientific research of mink and European otters, the PCB levels found in Upper Hudson River mink and otter may cause adverse health effects and reproductive problems in these animals.

(MORE)

-2-

The study found PCBs in flood plain soils in the Upper Hudson River Valley between Stillwater, Saratoga County and Fort Edward, Washington County, ranging from 0.018 ppm to 360 ppm, with levels generally highest in low-lying areas adjacent to the river and in areas closer to Fort Edward. An analysis of short-tailed shrews living on the flood plain showed PCB levels ranging from 0.05 ppm to 38 ppm. Shrews are small, mouse like animals that feed on earthworms and other animals, and are also prey for owls and other wildlife.

DEC and the federal trustees working on the NRDA will continue to investigate contamination of mammals and flood plain soils, including the link between feeding habitats and exposure to PCBs. The findings of the study will be used to determine actions, including possible restoration projects, that will mitigate damages resulting from PCB contamination of the Hudson River. In addition, based on these findings, the trustees may undertake studies of other wildlife and natural resources, including birds.

A long-term fish monitoring program to measure PCB concentrations in fish in the Hudson River was initiated by DEC in 1977. The concentration levels have varied over time, but still greatly exceed values considered a reasonable risk for human consumption of fish, including the Environmental Protection Agency's goal of 0.05 for unrestricted consumption. DEC considers a PCB concentration level of 0.11 ppm in fish to be the level where it is safe for other animals to eat those fish.

As a result, DEC has limited recreational fishing in the Hudson River between the Troy dam and Hudson Falls, Washington County, to catch and release angling only. Commercial fishing is prohibited in this area and restricted south of the Troy dam as well. Advisories are listed in the DEC Fishing Regulations Guide and are also available on the agency website, www.dec.state.ny.us. The State Department of Health has also issued advisories regarding the consumption of fish taken from specific sections of the Hudson River, including an advisory that children and women of child-bearing age not consume any fish taken from the Hudson River south of Hudson Falls.

###

01-52

600047