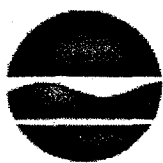


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NEWS

**NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**

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George E. Pataki, Governor

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For Release: Wednesday, Sept. 30, 1998

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EPA Provides State \$168,000 for Health Advisory Outreach

*State will expand program to educate public about risks of
eating Hudson River fish*

State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner John P. Cahill and Department of Health (DOH) Commissioner Dr. Barbara DeBuono today announced that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has committed \$140,000 in grants to expand the State's efforts to educate the public about the State's advisories against eating PCB-contaminated fish from the Hudson River, and to assess the need for an enhanced education campaign in nearby waters. The State and EPA also agreed to redirect \$28,000 from an existing public education grant, bringing the total funds now dedicated to this program to \$168,000.

DEC Commissioner Cahill said, "New York State has long sought to expand our programs to educate the public about the risks of eating PCB-contaminated fish, and I am delighted that the federal government is willing to expand its partnership with the State on this important task. DEC has for several years aggressively pursued federal funding for an expanded program, and it is gratifying to see that EPA shares our belief that this is an important public health issue."

"Educating the public about the dangers of eating PCB-contaminated fish is an important component of our environmental health program," State Health Commissioner Barbara A. DeBuono said. "These federal grants will be an effective supplement to our widely-used Health Advisories for sportfish and game."

The grants will provide \$120,000 for public education and outreach in the Hudson River from Hudson Falls to Battery City Park in Manhattan, and \$48,000 to assess the need for additional outreach activities in New York Harbor and the marine waters of Westchester and Nassau counties. The grants will be shared by DEC and DOH, and will focus primarily on public education campaigns in the Hudson River Valley south of Hudson Falls in Washington County, where PCB contamination of fish is most serious.

The EPA grants will fund two full-time environmental educators and six seasonal "Health Rangers" to better inform people who may be eating Hudson River fish about the State's health advisories and to assess the effectiveness of the outreach efforts. English and Spanish language health advisory brochures will be reprinted, and a Russian brochure will be developed. Signs informing

the public of the health advisories will be posted.

In addition, DOH and DEC will work with local communities to identify the most effective ways to educate targeted audiences about the State's fish consumption health advisories. This educational campaign will reach beyond anglers and will include the diverse cultural/ethnic populations who consume fish taken from the Hudson River.

DEC has conducted public education activities to promote awareness of fish consumption advisories since 1993, and have been seeking additional federal funding to expand these programs since April 1997.

An initial \$169,000 EPA grant for public education efforts in the Hudson River Valley and the Great Lakes was awarded in September 1993, and supplemental \$40,000 grants were awarded in September 1994 and September 1996. When the Upper Hudson was opened to catch and release fishing in 1995, DEC devoted significant resources to expanding upper Hudson River public education activities, and sought additional federal funding for this purpose.

On April 1, 1997 DEC wrote EPA requesting additional funding to significantly expand this program due to its importance in protecting public health, particularly in low-income and minority communities.

On July 9, 1998, EPA Administrator Browner promised the State a \$100,000 grant to expand its outreach programs. Two days later, DEC staff met with EPA to discuss the grant, and on August 4, DEC submitted an initial application for the grant. DEC revised its application twice to reflect comments from EPA.

As a result of PCB contamination in the lower Hudson River south of Troy, DOH has issued a Fish Consumption Health Advisory which recommends that women of childbearing age, infants and children under the age of 15 should not eat any fish taken from the Hudson River. From Troy up to Hudson Falls, the State recommends that people eat no fish at all. For other potential consumers, the advisory identifies specific river reaches and fish species for which specific consumption limitations are recommended.

Additional funds are needed to complete all of the tasks the State has identified for the Hudson River education and outreach effort in its plan. EPA has indicated that existing funds will be redirected and additional funds will be provided for these activities as they become available.

Today's grants also provide \$48,000 for DEC and DOH to begin developing a fish consumption advisory education and outreach program for communities around New York Harbor, the eastern shore of Westchester County, and the near western New York shore of the Long Island Sound.