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NEWS

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**FIRST SUBSTANTIVE HUDSON RIVER PCB REASSESSMENT FINDINGS TO BE PEER
REVIEWED EARLY IN 1999, EPA ANNOUNCES**

(#98159) NEW YORK, NY -- Two key Hudson River PCBs Reassessment Reports -- the Data Evaluation and Interpretation Report (DEIR) and the complementary Low Resolution Sediment Coring Report (LRC) -- will be peer reviewed early in 1999, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today. Peer review will be conducted by independent experts who do not have conflicts of interest relating to the Hudson River Site and its associated PCB issues. As demonstrated by the peer review conducted in September 1998 of EPA's modeling approach, the peer review of the Data Evaluation and Interpretation Report (DEIR) and the Low Resolution Sediment Coring Report (LRC) will not delay the Hudson River remedy selection schedule.

The Data Evaluation and Interpretation Report, released in February 1997, found that the PCB load from sediments is the primary source of PCBs to the freshwater Hudson and that PCBs in the sediments will not be naturally remediated via dechlorination.

The Low Resolution Sediment Coring Report, released in July 1998, compared sediment cores taken from known PCB hotspots in 1994 with cores taken from the same areas ten or more years earlier. It found a net loss of PCB inventory in hot spot sediments, including a loss of approximately 40 percent of the PCB inventory from highly contaminated sediments in the Thompson Island Pool (TIP). The LRC also found that widespread burial of PCB-contaminated sediment by clean sediment in the TIP is not occurring.

The Peer Review panel will review the two documents to evaluate whether acceptable scientific methods were used to determine the findings in the reports. Under EPA's national policy, major scientific and/or technical work products, such as the Phase 2 Reports for the Hudson River PCBs Reassessment, are subject to peer review. The peer review addresses only the science on which decisions will be based, not the decisions themselves.

Throughout the study, EPA has employed innovative technologies such as PCB "fingerprinting" in order to ascertain the origin, fate and transport of PCBs in the Hudson. "We are extremely proud of the innovative and sound scientific approaches we have used in our Reassessment of Hudson River PCB contamination," said Deputy Regional Administrator William M. Muszynski. "Peer review provides invaluable assurance from respected and independent scientific experts that we are on the right track."

The DEIR and LRCR are part of the extensive work EPA has undertaken to understand the nature of the PCB contamination in the Hudson River. This work will be used to determine what action, if any, should be taken to address this problem. EPA is conducting a reassessment of its 1984 decision to take no action on the PCB-contaminated sediments in a 40-mile stretch of the Hudson River between Hudson Falls and the Troy Dam. The agency expects to present a draft decision on how to address this site to the public in December 2000, followed by a final Record of Decision in June 2001.

Members of the Peer Review panel will be selected by Eastern Research Group Inc. (ERG), a contractor specializing in this type of work. The Peer Review panel is to be made up of individuals with expertise in the subject matter under review. Panel members are screened for conflicts of interest to insure selection of a panel that is unbiased and independent of the project under review.

The peer review panel will meet for several days during mid-March 1999. Sessions will be open to public observation. The two reports had been scheduled to be peer reviewed along with other Phase 2 Reports in October 1999, shortly after the release of Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessments.

EPA decided to move up the peer review of these two reports in order to facilitate incorporation of independent, external comments on the reports earlier in the process. In addition, by breaking out the peer reviews on these reports, it eliminates part of the overlap of reviews at the end of Phase 2, allowing EPA and other interested parties to observe the proceedings.

SITE BACKGROUND

EPA began the Hudson River PCB Reassessment in 1990 in order to review its 1984 decision to leave the PCB-contaminated sediments in the Hudson River in place. The Superfund site is delineated as the Hudson River from Hudson Falls to the Battery in New York City. The Reassessment, while looking at the entire River, concentrates its efforts on a 40-mile stretch of the River between Hudson Falls and the Federal Dam at Troy, which contains historical "hot spots" of PCB-contaminated sediments. These sediments became contaminated from the release of approximately 1.1 million pounds of PCBs discharged into the river over a 30-year period (1940's-1970's) by two General Electric capacitor plants at Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, New York.

The PCB contamination of the Hudson River has resulted in health advisories on fish in the Lower Hudson (below Troy) and an almost total ban on consumption of fish caught between the bridge at Catskill and Hudson Falls to the north. PCBs are considered to be a probable human carcinogen by the EPA and other national and international health agencies.

The Hudson River PCBs Reassessment Study is being conducted in three Phases, with the agency presently in the midst of Phase 2. A decision on how to address this site will be made in the year 2001. Since the peer review process is conducted concurrently with the work of the Reassessment, the peer review announced by EPA today will not delay that decision date.

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