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EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency
REGION 2 New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico & U.S. Virgin Islands

EPA REPORTS SHOW PCBS FROM UPPER HUDSON RIVER MAY AFFECT HUMAN HEALTH IN MID-HUDSON; THREATEN FISH & WILDLIFE IN LOWER HUDSON FOR DECADES

For Release: Tuesday, January 4, 2000

(#00004) New York, New York -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released two reports, which conclude that the PCBs originating in the Upper Hudson River pose considerable risks to human health and the environment far south of the Federal Dam at Troy, New York. These reports, called baseline risk assessments, characterize current and future threats posed by PCBs if no cleanup is implemented for the PCB-contaminated sediments of the Upper Hudson River or no institutional controls, such as fish consumption advisories or fishing bans, are in place. Fish consumption advisories are currently in effect for the entire Hudson River.

"These reports show that PCBs from the Upper Hudson River continue to pose risks to human health and the environment many miles downstream of where they entered the river and these risks will remain well into the future," said EPA Regional Administrator Jeanne M. Fox. "EPA is committed to evaluating the best alternatives for addressing PCB contamination in Upper Hudson River sediments and has developed an aggressive schedule to finalize the proposed plan to protect public health and the environment."

These risk assessments are companion reports to two baseline risk assessments, released by EPA in August 1999, which evaluated risks to human health and the environment from PCBs in the Upper Hudson (Hudson Falls to the Federal Dam at Troy). The earlier reports concluded that PCB contamination in the Upper Hudson poses considerable risks to human health and the environment. All four risk assessment reports will be peer reviewed in May 2000. EPA will use risk assessments to help establish acceptable exposure levels and evaluate various cleanup alternatives for the PCB-contaminated sediments in the Upper Hudson River.

In the Human Health Risk Assessment for the Mid-Hudson River, EPA evaluated both cancer and non-cancer health effects of PCBs on children, adolescents and adults, from the Federal Dam at Troy, New York to just south of Poughkeepsie, New York.

PCBs are probable carcinogens in humans and are known to cause cancer in animals. Other long-term adverse health effects of PCBs observed in laboratory animals include a reduced ability to fight infections, low birth weights, and learning problems.

The report concludes:

Eating fish from the Mid-Hudson River is the primary way for humans to be exposed to the PCBs.

Under EPA's approach for ensuring protection of human health, there is an increased risk of four additional cases of cancer for every 10,000 people eating an average of one meal a week of fish caught in the Mid-Hudson. This increased cancer risk is

about 100 times higher than EPA's goal for protection under the federal Superfund law.

For non-cancer health effects, the level of exposure to PCBs from eating an average of one meal a week of fish caught in the Mid-Hudson is 30 times higher than EPA's level of concern.

Under the baseline conditions, in which no cleanup is implemented or no institutional controls are in place, the cancer risks and non-cancer health hazards would be above EPA's generally acceptable levels for the 40-year exposure period evaluated in the report.

Risks from exposure to PCBs in the river through other means, such as ingestion of river water for drinking water purposes and recreational skin contact with contaminated sediments and river water, and incidental ingestion of sediments, were shown to be significantly below EPA's levels of concern.

In the Ecological Risk Assessment, EPA evaluated the future risks to more than 15 different fish and wildlife species in the Lower Hudson River (Federal Dam at Troy to the Battery at New York City) that have various feeding preferences, predatory levels, and habitats. PCBs are persistent in the environment and are known to bioaccumulate up the food chain.

The major findings of the report are:

Fish in the Lower Hudson River are at risk due to the PCBs, and larger fish that eat other fish, such as the largemouth bass and striped bass, are especially at risk. The PCBs may adversely affect fish survival, growth, and reproduction.

Birds and mammals that eat fish, such as the belted kingfisher, great blue heron, mink and river otter, are also at risk. PCBs may adversely affect the survival and reproduction of these animals.

Future concentrations of PCBs in water and sediments in the Lower Hudson River are expected to exceed standards and guidelines established to be protective of the environment for decades to come.

Threatened and endangered species, as well as animals that use areas along the river designated as significant habitats, may be adversely affected by the PCBs in the future.

The risks to fish and wildlife are greatest in the upper reaches of the Lower Hudson River and decrease as PCB concentrations decrease down river. Under baseline conditions for the Upper Hudson River, many species in the Lower Hudson River are expected to be at risk for decades to come.

EPA will hold a public meeting to discuss the findings of these reports on Tuesday, January 11, 2000 at 7:00 p.m. at the Sheraton Hotel, 40 Civic Center Plaza, Poughkeepsie, New York. A public availability session will be held on Tuesday,January 18, 2000 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Sheraton Hotel in Poughkeepsie. The risk assessments will be posted on EPA's web site for the Reassessment RI/FS at www.epa.gov/hudson.

EPA will accept public comment on these risk assessments through January 28, 2000. EPA's responses to public comments received will be released in responsiveness summaries in March 2000.

For more information contact:

Ann Rychlenski, Press Office
EPA Region 2
290 Broadway
NY, NY 10007-1866
Voice: 212-637-3672 FAX: 212-637-4445 E-Mail: rychlenski.ann@epamail.epa.gov

Return to top of this News Release
Return to News Release Index.
Return to EPA R2 Frontpage
http://www.epa.gov/region02/

Region 2 Main Page | Search Region 2 | Comments | EPA Main Page