

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency • Region 2**

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**EPA PROPOSES COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO CLEAN UP HUDSON
RIVER PCBS****Proposal Based on Extensive Scientific Study of PCB Risks to People and
Wildlife**

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, December 6, 2000

(#00218) New York, N.Y. -- After a ten-year, exhaustive scientific study of the contamination of the Hudson River from polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, U.S. EPA Administrator Carol Browner today announced a proposed plan to clean up the river and protect public health.

"The Hudson River is among America's great natural treasures," said Browner. Today's proposal comes after ten years of extensive scientific study. This scientific assessment is the basis for today's action -- one of the most aggressive environmental efforts ever proposed to restore a contaminated river and protect the public's health. The proposal targets the worst PCB hot spots for cleanup. It recognizes the need for stepped up containment of new PCB contamination from active sources. And it will ensure that cleanup efforts are sensitive to the needs of local communities. We will be taking full public comment on this proposal and listening to all involved before a final cleanup plan is adopted."

People who eat PCB-contaminated fish face an increased risk of cancer and other serious medical conditions including developmental, immune system, thyroid and reproductive problems. The chemicals pose a special risk to the health of children.

The PCB contamination of the Hudson dates back to a 30 year period ending in 1977 during which the General Electric Company (GE) discharged as much as 1.3 million pounds of PCBs directly into the river from their facilities in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, New York.

The cleanup would remove over 100,000 pounds of PCBs that would potentially contaminate people, fish and wildlife through the food chain. It would reduce risks to health and fish by five times immediately following the cleanup. The State will be able to relax fish consumption advisories within two years after cleanup is completed.

The scientific reassessment found that without targeted dredging, concentrations of PCBs are not expected to reach acceptable health and safety levels. The reassessment determined that the natural breakdown of PCBs cannot be relied on to significantly reduce risks to human health. PCBs now buried in the river's sediments are not remaining in place, the assessment found, and instead are moving downstream. Limited burial has not stopped the sediments from contaminating Hudson River fish, which still have PCBs far in excess of safe levels.

EPA has had extensive experience with successful and dredging projects. The proposed cleanup plan targets for dredging the most contaminated portion of the river -- about 12 percent of the 40-mile stretch of the upper Hudson from Fort Edward downstream to the Federal Dam at Troy. The plan calls for the removal of over 2.6 million cubic yards of contaminated sediment, backfilling with clean material, then disposal and ongoing monitoring. After treatment, the dredged material would be transported away from river communities by rail for disposal. The plan recognizes the need for stepped-up containment of PCBs still entering the river through fractures in the bedrock beneath the GE Hudson Falls plant. EPA will consider public comment on this plan and expects to finalize an approach to the Hudson River cleanup in June 2001.

EPA evaluated a capping alternative for the river as a whole to contain PCB sediments, but found it would be unreliable. EPA rejected an alternative for bank-to-bank dredging in favor of targeted dredging of the contaminated areas. The dredging project, which would require GE responsibility for cleanup under the Superfund law, would take an estimated five years to complete and is estimated to cost about \$460 million.

The scientific reassessment of the PCB-contamination problem began in 1990, six years after the Hudson River site was placed on Superfund's National Priorities List. It was aimed at understanding PCB contamination in the sediments of the upper Hudson River between the Federal Dam at Troy and Hudson Falls. All of the science was peer reviewed by independent scientific experts. EPA considered public comments, including submissions from GE, throughout its review over the past decade.

EPA will provide a detailed presentation of the Proposed Plan at two public meetings: Tuesday, December 12, 2000 at 7:00 p.m. at the Saratoga Springs City Center, located on Broadway in Saratoga Springs, New York, and on Thursday, December 14, 2000 at 7:00 p.m. at the Sheraton Civic Center Hotel, 40 Civic Center Plaza in Poughkeepsie, New York. Both of these meetings will be preceded by an open house exhibit chronicling the work of the Reassessment. The open house begins at 4:30 p.m. at each meeting venue. Additional public meetings will be held after the holidays, during the public comment period, at various Hudson Valley locations.

The Proposed Plan will soon be available for public review at EPA's website at www.epa.gov/hudson and at the information repositories located throughout the Hudson Valley, which have been established for this project. Written public comment will be taken on the Proposed Plan during the public comment period, which runs from December 12, 2000 until February 16, 2001, and should be sent to: Alison Hess/Doug Tomchuk, Hudson River PCBs Public Comment, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 290 Broadway, New York, New York 10007.

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