

PostStar.com

# THE POST-STAR TOP STORY

Search: 

GO

Wednesday, July 11, 2001

[Home](#)[Local News](#)[Regional News](#)[Nat./Int. News](#)[Business](#)[Classifieds](#)[Community](#)[Entertainment](#)[Food](#)[Health](#)[Living](#)[Obituaries](#)[Opinion](#)[Religion](#)[Sports](#)[Travel](#)[Weather](#)[Search](#)

*Click here for more information...*  
*Or call 518-792-3131 ext-3252*

[Back to Main Page](#)

Monty Calvert - The Post-Star

From left, Penny Mabb, her husband, Michael, and their neighbors, Danny Condon, Danny's father, Clark R. Condon Sr., and Tom Harrington talk in their back yards about PCB contamination and its effect on residents of their neighborhood in West Glens Falls.

## Report urges state to widen backyard PCB cleanup

### Research firm: Contamination widespread in West Glens Falls neighborhood

By THOM RANDALL [randall@poststar.com](mailto:randall@poststar.com)

QUEENSBURY -- The president of an environmental research company charged Tuesday that the state has not gone far enough in cleaning up PCB contamination in a West Glens Falls neighborhood, and he urged New York officials to take measures to protect the health of its residents.

Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting Inc. of Ithaca, said Tuesday that initial research by his company indicates that PCB contamination in the Luzerne Road area is likely much more widespread than either the public or state agencies now realize.

At a press conference in Albany this morning, the company will announce the findings of its report summarizing the extent of PCB pollution in the West Glens Falls area, Hang said.

The West Glens Falls neighborhood is where the state Department of Environmental Conservation has conducted several large-scale PCB cleanup efforts, one in 1979 and another completed in 2000. Individuals and businesses conducted capacitor salvage operations there in the 1960s and early 1970s.

In such salvaging -- conducted at people's homes and at several scrap yards -- people pulled copper and aluminum out of discarded capacitors and poured the PCBs from the capacitors onto the ground or into pits.

Hang called for the state to launch a new, aggressive investigation into PCB contamination of the West Glens Falls area to find where capacitors and PCBs were dumped and salvaged, conduct an extensive soil-testing program and clean up residual contamination as needed.

"I talked to dozens of people in the last few weeks, and I found that capacitors were burned and PCBs were dumped in places where appropriate cleanup has not yet occurred," he said.

"All these problems should be investigated and the contamination should be cleaned up without further delay.

"This is a tragedy of epic proportions," he said.

He also charged that the DEC had not been aggressive enough in conducting interviews with residents -- including capacitor scrappers, as the salvagers were known in the neighborhood -- to identify contaminated sites and clean them up.

"If state authorities had gone door-to-door, they would have found many more salvage operations which left PCB contamination, which now present a health hazard in the area," he said.

Hang also warned that PCBs, including those buried at a disposal site on Luzerne Road, were continuing to move and contaminate more and more properties.

DEC spokeswoman Jennifer Meicht defended her agency's actions.

"We sent out surveys to over 50 homes in the area, and only nine of the surveys were returned," she said.

"We also made an effort to contact people near homes where we found evidence of PCB contamination and then we tested 25 nearby homes.

"Eight of those homes required cleanup action. Whenever evidence is brought to our attention, the agency will go out and investigate," she said.

Last year, the DEC concluded a PCB cleanup project that included digging up the yards of residents of Indiana Street and Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Upper

Sherman avenues.

At these sites -- where PCB concentrations of up to 3,500 parts per million were discovered -- soil was stripped as deep as 24 feet underground, and groundwater was extracted and treated. The state considers soil to be hazardous waste if it tests in excess of 50 parts per million of PCBs.

In that two-year project, the agency excavated and removed about 3,663 tons of dirt, disposing of much of it in hazardous waste landfills across the state.

On Monday and Tuesday, residents of the Rhode Island and Massachusetts Avenue neighborhood gathered in their back yards and talked about the cleanup and their persistent health problems they think may be caused by PCBs.

"A lot of people in the neighborhood have died of cancer," Massachusetts Avenue resident Michael Mabb said as his wife Penny and neighbor Thomas Harrington compared scars from persistent boils and skin eruptions they have suffered with for years.

Harrington pointed to an open, red wound on Penny Mabb's arm.

"My daughter Tammy gets them all the time -- they come up like boils, they bust, then fill back up again and they never seem to clear up," he said, explaining that several of his children and his sister suffer these persistent eruptions along with other ailments associated with PCB exposure.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, a class of persistent, bioaccumulating oily chemicals, were used as an insulator in capacitors manufactured by General Electric Co. at their Hudson Falls and Fort Edward plants until they were banned in the mid-1970s.

Scientists worldwide have contended that PCBs bioaccumulate in the food chain, persist for decades or centuries in the environment, cause reproductive deformities and developmental problems in humans and animals, and cause cancer and lesions in wildlife.

## Lawyer: Homeowners plan to sue GE

By THOM RANDALL [randall@poststar.com](mailto:randall@poststar.com)

QUEENSBURY -- General Electric Co. will soon face lawsuits totaling tens of billions of dollars in damages from West Glens Falls residents exposed to PCBs from capacitor salvage operations that occurred decades ago, a New York City environmental lawyer said Tuesday.

Lawyer Marc Bern, of Napoli, Kaiser Bern & Associates of New York City, said he has been interviewing and exchanging documents with dozens of residents of the West Glens Falls neighborhood where, in the 1960s and 1970s, individuals and businesses pulled copper and aluminum out of discarded GE capacitors and poured

the PCBs from the capacitors onto the ground or into pits.

The individual lawsuits, which might number as many as 100, Bern said, will claim significant loss of property value and personal injury and will demand more comprehensive cleanup than has already been undertaken by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, Bern said.

"The personal suffering in these cases is amazing," Bern said.

"People in this area have lived with persistent sores, boils, strange medical conditions, and they've been afflicted with numerous cancers. Now, people are learning these diseases are caused by long-term exposure to PCBs."

The first of these lawsuits will be filed early next week in state Supreme Court in Albany County on behalf of Penny Mabb and her husband Michael Mabb of Massachusetts Avenue, Bern said.

Penny Mabb has been suffering for years from persistent boils and skin eruptions -- a medical condition linked to PCB exposure, Bern said.

Also, Penny Mabb in 1996 suffered three aneurysms in her brain -- due to weakened, diseased blood vessels -- that have caused her permanent mental impairment, her husband said Tuesday.

Weakened, diseased blood vessels have been linked to PCB exposure in various scientific studies, according to Dr. David Carpenter, professor of environmental health and toxicology at the University at Albany.

He has said scientists have linked PCB exposure to a higher-than-normal incidence of diabetes, thyroid trouble, various cancers, spinal degeneration and reproductive and developmental problems.

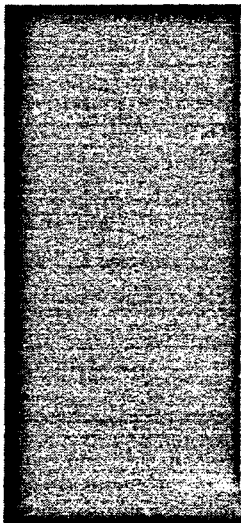
As a resident of a property adjacent to where PCBs were once dumped, Penny Mabb was tested by the state Department of Health for PCB levels in her blood, and the results showed an abnormally high level of 6.3 parts per billion of PCBs, Michael Mabb said.

Between the mid-1940s and early 1970s, GE manufactured capacitors in plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, and it has spent more than \$180 million in cleaning up PCBs and other chemicals at those plant sites since then. The company is also facing a proposed \$490 million cleanup of PCBs dumped from the plants into the Hudson River.

GE is the target of the lawsuit because, Bern said, the company improperly disposed of scrap capacitors at various landfills.

"GE is the polluter and those capacitors had no warning labels," he said.

"Also, GE did not let governmental agencies know where they were dumped, and there's no excuse for it. The company knew people were taking these capacitors and they didn't care.



"They knew PCBs were dangerous and, under the law, they are responsible for that knowledge."

GE spokesman Mark Behan said his company had acted within the law.

"Any lawsuit on this issue against GE is misplaced," he said.

"GE did not dispose of capacitors or PCBs on these people's properties. GE disposed of capacitors in properly licensed facilities and through recognized, appropriately licensed businesses."

---

[Back to Main Page](#)

---

[Contact Info](#) | [Advertising Info](#) | [Jobs @ The Post-Star](#) | [Sitemap](#)

---

[Local News](#) | [Regional News](#) | [Nat./Int. News](#) | [Business](#) | [Classified](#) | [Community](#) | [Entertainment](#)  
[Food](#) | [Health](#) | [Living](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Religion](#) | [Sports](#) | [Travel](#) | [Weather](#) | [Home](#)

© Copyright 2001 Glens Falls Newspapers Inc. The Post-Star. All rights reserved.  
This material may not be broadcast, published, rewritten or redistributed without written permission.

**timesunion.com**

[Home](#) : [News](#) : [Today's Stories](#)

 [E-mail story link to a friend](#)  [Printer-friendly version](#)

## Residents plan to sue GE over PCB-saturated land

Queensbury-- 100 separate lawsuits will seek billions in damages

By **DINA CAPPIELLO**, Staff writer  
First published: Wednesday, July 11, 2001

Residents of a Warren County neighborhood where PCBs saturated yards and accumulated in capacitor junkyards for decades plan to file 100 separate lawsuits seeking billions of dollars in damages from General Electric Co.

The lawsuits -- which represent a rare, if not unprecedented, legal action in the 25-year saga surrounding PCB contamination from GE's Hudson Falls and Fort Edward capacitor plants -- will argue that the company damaged property and human health and should be held liable for the cleanup of the neighborhood, according to the attorney bringing the case in state Supreme Court as early as next week.

The 100 plaintiffs, which include six outside of the neighborhood, are all people who live on land that was tainted with PCBs when the industrial chemical that GE used as an insulator was spread on roads for dust control, leaked out of capacitors that were discarded or dismantled, or dredged out of the river and placed in upland disposal sites.

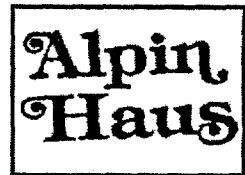
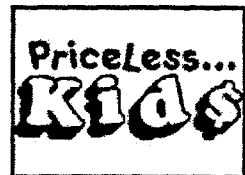
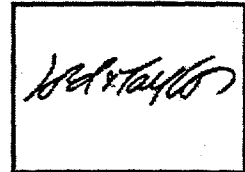
All these actions were common in the upper Hudson River valley before 1977, the year the federal government banned PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, from use because of their ability to cause cancer in laboratory rats.

"As far as my clients are concerned, GE should be punished. GE is the company who should clean it up," said Marc Bern, the residents' attorney, who hired Ithaca-based Toxics Targeting Inc. to find a community where people were affected by PCB contamination.

But even though GE has admitted responsibility for contaminating the Hudson River, which, according to the EPA, makes the company liable for a \$460 million cleanup, the company says it did

**TODAY'S ADS** 

Click on logos below to see newspaper ads for Wednesday, July 11:



**NEWSPAPER ADS**

**TODAY'S ADS**

**THIS WEEK'S ADS**

not directly pollute the properties in question. According to the state, GE and local residents, private companies and citizens, and in the case of dredging, the state, carried out those actions. "Any lawsuit on this issue against GE would be misplaced," said Mark Behan, a company spokesman. "GE did not dispose of PCBs or capacitors on these people's properties."

The state, which excavated seven properties in 1979 and six properties in the fall of 2000 in Queensbury to remove PCB-contaminated soil, has labeled GE responsible for the cleanup of the 9-acre area around Luzerne Road. The state Superfund site includes a 300-square-foot junkyard that took in GE capacitors from 1958 to 1968, a leaky disposal site erected by the state for the sediment removed in 1979, and more than a dozen residences nearby where capacitors from the junkyard were taken and dismantled for their copper wire.

"Everybody around here was a junkie," said Clark Condon, a resident of the neighborhood for more than 30 years and one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, referring to the dismantling of capacitors that occurred in the community and leaked PCBs into the ground.

His yard was excavated twice, in 1979 and 2000. The second time all that was left was his house, surrounded by a chasm of dirt.

While he says he and his family had no health effects from the contamination, other residents in the area say they do. In 1979, Tommy Harrington broke out in boils during the excavations.

But a survey of 18 residents who lived at the six contaminated properties, conducted by the state Health Department in 2000, found that the PCBs in their blood were no higher than those of people in the general population.

To date, the state has spent \$763,000 on the cleanup and will seek reimbursement from GE.

DEC spokeswoman Jennifer Meicht said the pending lawsuit would have no effect on the state's ability to pursue GE.

SUN MON TUES WED THURS FRI SAT 7-DAY ARCHIVE

[Return to Top](#)

Copyright 2001, Capital Newspapers Division of The Hearst Corporation, Albany, N.Y. The information you receive online from Times Union is protected by the copyright laws of the United States. The copyright laws prohibit any copying, redistributing, retransmitting, or repurposing of any copyright-protected material.



NPR piece - airing today

1) LISTEN TO WHAT'S PLAYING NOW 93.9 FM AM 820 HELP

The Toxic Valley: PCBs along the upper Hudson

Sign up for  
WNYC Mail

→ [Photos](#)

◀ [Listen](#)

→ [Links](#)

## Part 1: The Harringtons

SFX GE Factory Noise.

**This is the General Electric plant in Fort Edward New York. This plant and one just a mile up the river made capacitors and transformers. They were bustling centers, employing thousands, bringing relative prosperity to this poor region.**

**There was a byproduct of all that activity - poly chlorinated biphenyls, a class of 209 chemicals prized because they are stable and don't catch fire.**

**But that durability had a cost - PCBs are remarkably persistent. They don't dissolve in water, and once inside humans or animals, they simply accumulate. Still, there were no prohibitions against dumping PCBs until the 1970's.**

SFX: Luzerne Road ambient sound.

**This is Tom Harrington's backyard, in QUEENSBURY, just a few miles from Fort Edward.**

**In the 1950's and 1960's, faulty capacitors from the GE plants would find their way into the town dump just up the road from here.**

**Mr. Harrington's son, Paul Green says the townspeople would forage for the capacitors.**

**Green: I used to work with an old guy who worked across the street...22 year old Chet Tucker would sit around in his back yard stripping apart these motors and taking apart these canisters and puling the copper out of them for him to sell it and they just disposed of the canisters in the backyard you'd go there and spend the day with him, he'd give you a quarter and take you fishing and you thought you were in heaven...**

**Like everyone else who lived here, Paul Green says he had no idea he was handling a dangerous substance.**

**Years later, in 1979, the State Department of Environmental Conservation -- or DEC -- came in a tested the soil around the town dump.**

**They found high levels of PCBs, removed some soil and brought in some fresh top soil.**

**And that, Tom Harrington thought, was that.**



**Until the summer of 2000.**

Harrington: what they told me was they had more technology now, so they came back and checking all previous sites.

**The DEC did indeed find PCBs on this soil - soil Mr. Harrington has lived on with his family for almost 30 years.**

**The levels, Mr. Harrington says, ranged from 127 parts per million to 350 parts per million.**

**But then the DEC started digging - a hole that grew to 25 feet deep.**

Tom Harrington: but when they got digging right over there they found a canister, that was 3500 ppm, somewhere between the front of that truck that's covered up, and the fence

**The levels around the canister were 3500 parts per million.  
State standards require remediation for levels above one part per million.**

**The state spent three months digging up the dirt here - Mr. Harrington guesses about two hundred tractor-trailer loads were removed.**

**Tammy Thompson Harrington, Mr. Harrington's daughter, is a registered nurse.**

**When she heard about the PCBs in the home she grew up in, she began to wonder if they were linked to boils she's had since she was a child.**

Tammy: I've had em all my life, all my life I don't even remember the very first one I got, I get them everywhere that's personable, in my breasts, under my arms, in my groin area in the inside of my thighs.

**Her brother, Paul, said he never had the boils.**

**But while we are sitting at Tom Harrington's picnic table in a screen-in porch behind the modest Harrington home, he asks her about them.**

Tammy: right and it usually followed by blood

Paul: yup I have had those

Tammy: yah and they get really big I've got one, that's the one that never goes away, ever,

**Medical literature going back to 1937 shows boils, cysts, and chloracne result from PCB exposure.**

**But the symptoms don't end there.**

**Tom Harrington says he has back problems. His neighbor, Michael Mabb has heart trouble.**

Harrington: I got degenerative disk disease in my back, they removed a growth from my colon that they said would have been cancer if they hadn't found it other than that I guess I'm still alive

Bernstein: how about you

Mabb: I have memory problems, I have heart problems

**In fact, when the state found the PCB's here last fall, they offered the residents a chance to get tested.**

Bernstein: who at this table was tested?

All: All of us, all of us, all of us

Bernstein: Who has PCBs in their blood?

All: All of us all of us

**Michael Mabb runs over to his house to pick up a copy of his test results.**

**Tammy Harrington and Liz Moffre, who grew up next door, take a look.**

Liz: oh my lord!

Tammy: Oh my good lord!

Liz: that's his wife, 6.3

Mabb: she's had brain aneurysms, degenerate back, she's got sores on the arms and legs,

Liz: yes she does, she has sores all over and I went to school with her and she is nothing now like the girl I went to school with...

**The people who were tested, the state says, had levels within the range for people who have had no unusual exposure.**

**But Dr. David Carpenter, an MD and director of the Institute for Health and the Environment at the University of Albany says levels above 5 are abnormal. And he says the diseases the Mabbs and the Harringtons describe -- heart problems, disk disorders, skin lesions -- have been linked to PCBs**

Carpenter: The major diseases of concern are cancer, suppression of the immune system, neurobehavioral effect, reduction in IQ, shortened attention span, disruptive behavior...there are Well documented effects on reproductive system in general, on male hormones and female hormones.

**Liz Moffre says she tried - and failed - to have children.**

**Tammy Harrington says she tried for five years before her daughter was born, another four years for her son.**

Tammy: my son was not a healthy baby he was sick from day one with his ears and sinuses and everything. My daughter ashley, she's thirteen, she's going into eight grade, she still has about a fourth or fifth grade reading level

**That's one of the most well documented effects of PCBs, says Dr. Phillip Landrigan, Director of the Center for Children's Health and the Environment at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.**

Landrigan: There is unequivocal evidence from studies in Michigan, upstate New

York, N.Carolina and Holland that PCBs cross into the babies brain, they cause brain damage there and the brain damage shows up as decreased intelligence, learning problems, and decreased intelligence...

**The problems of PCBs on land are not limited to Queensbury, according to Walter Hang, of Toxics Targeting.**

**He runs a company that keeps an environmental database of state toxic waste dumps.**

**This spring, he ran PCB-related waste dumps through his computer.**

Hang: and I determined that about 6 times more PCB pollution was dumped on land than in the Judson river so the scope of the PCB problem was much bigger than any one believed.

**The General Electric company has said it always followed the law with respect to its release of PCBs. And it is adamant that PCBs are not hazardous to human health.**

**But Gardiner Congdon, a local town supervisor during the 70's and 80's, a**

**Says the state and federal government, through inaction, wrote off a whole generation of the area's children.**

Congdon: and that's basically what happened, a whole generation of children brought in close contact with this stuff and saying we're going to write you off you're going to spend your childhood living next to an unremediated dumpsite while we fool around and do paperwork.

**State Department of Environmental Conservation Spokeswoman Jennifer Meicht says the state had no reason to do routine monitoring.**

Meicht: At the time the clean-up was conducted based on the technology at that time and we had completed the cleanup and to the best of our knowledge all of the contamination was removed.

**She says the state will only monitor other sites if presented with evidence of high PCB levels. For WNYC, I'm Andrea Bernstein in Queensbury, New York**

***Support for this report comes from the Rivendell Foundation.***

**[Back](#) to main page**