

# Officials talk to residents about PCB project

## Questions focus on site monitoring

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FORT EDWARD — Exactly how far covering up PCB deposits will go toward protecting the environment from future contamination is still unclear, even though federal officials are about to embark on a project to do just that.

Officials from the Environmental Protection Agency and General Electric Co. addressed about 30 residents in the Washington County Office Building Tuesday night regarding a plan to place manufactured caps over four deposits of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) situated along the Hudson River in Moreau and Fort Edward.

Between 1947 and 1977, GE discharged tons of PCBs into the river from its Hudson Falls and Fort Edward capacitor plants.

The deposits along the riverbank that remained behind when the Fort Edward dam was removed in 1973

are the remnant deposits, discussed in this project.

The \$10 million to \$12 million project, called an "interim" solution to the problem of PCBs entering the air and water from the deposits, is expected to begin this fall or winter with the construction of temporary roads to each of the four sites.

Actual construction at the sites will begin in March and the capping operation will take place from April through November, officials said Tuesday.

Many of the questions at Tuesday night's informational session focused on monitoring of the sites, truck traffic and on how much the huge effort actually will do to reduce the release of the suspected cancer-causing material into the environment.

GE and EPA officials put together a 50-minute presentation before opening the floor to questions.

Fort Edward resident Sharon Ruggi, whose mother-in-law's farm was once the target for a PCB disposal site, said she thought it was a "good project" but wondered how officials will know if it has worked.

EPA Project Manager Douglas Tomchuk said baseline tests of the

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area are going on now, and air monitoring would begin shortly. Monitoring of the area would continue throughout construction and for a period of time after completion, he said.

That would give EPA a full year of data on which to compare the effectiveness of the caps, he said.

Jeneanne Matthews, who operates a dairy farm south of the proposed project sites, asked if air monitoring tests would determine if airborne PCBs had drifted over her land.

The tests, Tomchuk answered, would be taken at locations closer to the deposits than her farm, but he said it was possible a formula could be derived to determine the air dispersion of the chemical.

He added that because GE is only covering the material and not disturbing it much, the work actually will reduce the amount of PCBs entering the air.

Bridget Barclay, of the Poughkeepsie-based Hudson River Sloop Clearwater environmental group, asked several questions about the need for the project and about whether the work complied with existing federal standards.

Afterward, she said EPA doesn't have "a handle" on how the PCBs are entering the air. She also said the capping project doesn't prevent

contaminated water from seeping beneath the cap into the river, nor does it address studies that show eating contaminated fish is more harmful to humans than any other PCB exposure.

Tomchuk said the cap, a combination of a manufactured clay substitute and a flexible fiber liner, is expected to significantly slow and reduce the release of PCBs from the deposits into the environment.

The cap, he said, would prevent rainwater from pushing PCBs into the river from above but admitted some contaminants still could seep into the water from below the cap. Rocks placed in the river around the capped areas would reduce erosion of the deposits, he said.

Officials will meet again with the public, this time on a more informal basis, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. today at the county office building.

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