

## EPA river meeting dominated by PCBs

**By Chris Sturgis**

Staff writer

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Criticism of the state Department of Environmental Conservation proposal to dredge PCBs from the Hudson River dominated a public meeting on the federal Environmental Protection Agency plan to review the river contamination.

Douglas Tomchuk, mediation projects manager, and Lillian Johnson, community relations specialist, repeated again and again Thursday that their agency, the EPA, will conduct an unbiased scientific review to determine the best response to the river contamination.

"I don't think that's true as far as (EnCon) is concerned," said George Mulvaney of Argyle, who said he served on the Citizens Advisory Committee on Hudson River Dredging in the mid-1980s. Mulvaney charged that EnCon failed to notify the committee of important meetings because it knew the committee opposed the river-dredging proposal.

Similar complaints about EnCon's failure to notify community organizations of important meetings came from Celia Murray, vice president of Concerned Citizens of the Environment, a group opposed to InterPower of New York Inc.'s proposal to build a coal-fired plant in Halfmoon. The plant would provide steam to General Electric and sell electricity to Niagara Mohawk.

"If this is going to work, you've got to do a better job than they're doing now," Murray said. Johnson said EPA would be keeping the public informed through community programs.

The majority of speakers at the meeting, which drew about 100 people, opposed the EnCon plan for dredging the river. Representatives of the Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Washington

County Board of Supervisors, and the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors said those groups have adopted resolutions opposing dredging.

Supervisor Paul F. Lilac of Stillwater said, "Dredging will only cause a stirring up of the PCBs and set back the natural cleaning of the river back several years."

Saying he has lived beside the Hudson River for all his 48 years, Lilac said, "Believe me, the river is cleaner now than it was when I used to play along its banks in the 1950s."

Speaking in support of dredging, John Coffman, who identified himself as a chemist with the Wright-Malta Corp., said dredging technologies are improving and allow the contamination ultimately to be disposed of.

Darryl Decker, chairman of the Washington County Board of Supervisors, caused a distinct pause in the question and answer session by asking, "Do you have a list of people who have died or suffered irreparable health damage because of PCBs?"

Tomchuk said the scientific belief that PCBs cause cancer is based on laboratory research on animals, not a list of PCBs victims.

Polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, are suspected human carcinogens and have been linked to liver, kidney and other health problems. However, there is only limited knowledge of actual human health effects and the issue has been the subject of intense scientific and public debate.

In an interview before the meeting, Michael J. O'Toole of EnCon said that if the EPA alters its 1984 decision against allocating Superfund money to remove the PCBs from the river, the state will have to pay for only 10 percent of the project. Otherwise, 100 percent of the dredging project will be financed by the state, he said.