



# EPA to study Hudson PCBs

## Pollutant from factories crushed river's fishing industry

By Tom Anderson  
Staff Writer

One by one since the 1970s, the Hudson River's most serious pollutants have virtually vanished under an onslaught of controls and cleanup.

Now the federal government is taking aim at the river's last major pollution problem — PCBs.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has embarked on a \$2 million study to learn the extent of PCB contamination in the river and to determine if there is a way to eliminate it.

Officials hope to finish the study by August 1992 and to begin cleaning up the

pollutant — which has contaminated almost all the river's fish and wiped out most of its commercial fishing industry — by 1995.

"There is nothing that even comes close to PCBs in terms of the problems it causes for the Hudson River," said Bridget Barclay, a study participant and the environmental director for the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, an environmental group based in Poughkeepsie.

"It is the single biggest pollutant in terms of keeping the striped bass fishery closed, in keeping the American eel fishery closed and in causing a total ban on fishing on the 40 miles of river between Hudson Falls and Troy."

Manufactured until 1977 by the Monsanto Co., PCBs — or polychlorinated biphenyls — were used to insulate and lubricate electrical components. They have been linked to cancer in animals and birth defects in humans.

From the late 1940s until 1977, General Electric dumped about 1.1 million pounds of PCBs into the Hudson from factories in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, north of Albany.

The pollutant settled on the river bottom behind a deteriorating dam at Fort Edward. But when the dam was demolished in 1973, the PCBs dispersed.

Please see PCBs, back page

12 NROS

## PCBs/From page one

A 40-mile stretch north of Troy, where the highest concentrations were found, was later ruled eligible for cleanup under the federal Superfund Act.

When the suspected carcinogen was detected in fish in 1976, the state banned commercial fishing on the river for all species except shad and made sport fishing illegal in the 40 miles north of Troy.

In 1984, EPA — afraid that dredging would stir the sediments and send them down river — ruled that for the time being, the safest thing was to do nothing. But in 1989, with new dredging methods available to stop the spread of sediments, EPA decided to review its decision.

The agency has hired TAMS Consultants of Manhattan and Gradient Corp. of Boston to do the study. The agency has also formed several groups of citizens and officials to oversee the work. The groups met for the first time last month in Saratoga Springs.

"This is an enormous, enormous undertaking," said Ann Rychlinski, EPA's coordinator of

the public's role in the study. "It's starting from square one."

According to Douglas Tomchuk, EPA's project manager, the study will be divided into three parts.

First, researchers will review cleanup methods, risks to the environment and human health, and how PCBs spread through the river and accumulate in fish. Tomchuk said he expected to have a report finished by May.

Second, scientists will take samples of contaminated sediments and perhaps try treating small amounts of it, Tomchuk said. The treatments, possibly chemical or biological, would be experimental.

As an example of a chemical treatment, Tomchuk said, the chlorine atoms that make up part of the PCBs could be separated from the chemical compound, leaving chlorine and biphenyls, which individually would be easier to dispose of. A biological treatment could involve exposing the PCBs to higher levels of bacteria and nutrients than they would encounter in the river in

hopes that they would consume the PCBs.

The work on part two of the project is slated to start in August.

Third, officials will study and evaluate different cleanup methods and eliminate those that won't work on the Hudson.

The choices, Tomchuk said, fall into three categories: do nothing; leave the PCBs in the river and either treat it or cap it so it does not spread; or remove it and treat it on land.

"We're not pro-dredge, we're not anti-dredge," Rychlinski said. "We're just looking at all the options."

Tomchuk said he hoped to have a final report by August 1992, followed by a recommendation, public hearings and the design of an actual cleanup plan.

There is no estimate of the cost, which he hopes to convince General Electric to pay, he said. If not, EPA could order the company to pay. As a last resort, federal Superfund money would be used.

## Westchester, Putnam residents threatened by PCB-laden fish

By Tom Anderson  
Staff Writer

When General Electric dumped 1.1 million pounds of PCBs into the Hudson River, most of the toxic substance settled to the bottom in the 40 miles of river north of Troy.

But despite living 150 miles from the contamination's epicenter, residents of Westchester and Putnam counties are still threatened by the polychlorinated biphenyls, which are suspected of causing cancer.

Dominick Pirone, a biologist at Manhattan College and founder of the Hudson River Fishermen's Association, said the PCBs get flushed down river

in spring floods and carried down in the fatty tissues of fish.

Melting snow and heavy rains swell the river with water and stir PCB-laden bottom sediments. If the spring floods are especially high — as they were in 1977 and 1978, Pirone said — the PCBs get carried down as far as New York Bay.

"That's why we want to get them out, to avoid one of these high-water incidents before they come along," Pirone said.

Fish pick up PCBs through their gills and by eating contaminated food they have foraged from the river, he said.

Two of the Hudson's most popular fish, striped bass and American eels, contain high

concentrations of PCBs. "A small portion of an eel will give you a lifetime dose of PCBs," Pirone said.

The contamination of striped bass extends beyond the river. According to Croton-on-Hudson resident Robert Boyle, author of a book titled "The Hudson River: A Natural and Unnatural History," striped bass caught in Long Island Sound west of the Connecticut River are likely to have spawned high PCB levels.

New York state has banned commercial fishing of stripers and warns sport fishermen against eating eels and striped bass.

Despite the massive effort, Barclay and Rep. Nita Lowey D-Harrison, said the study ignored the southern part of the river.

"The health, environmental

and economic effects of PCB contamination in the Hudson stretch far beyond the immediate vicinity of where the dumping occurred," Lowey said.

But, Barclay said, the problems do not outweigh the importance of the work.

"It's absolutely essential that they're doing it," she said.

A Section

70569

Gannett Westchester Newspapers/Thursday, March 28, 1991

10.10542