

## PCB toxins in Hudson River prompts Fish to evaluate situation; delays hit

Rep. Hamilton Fish Jr. met with a coalition of area environmental and citizens' groups recently to discuss the status of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination in the Hudson River.

The constituent groups expressed concern over the lack of commitment

by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to include non-cancerous health effects of PCBs and the overall sluggish pace that the EPA is moving at with its reassessment of Hudson River PCB contamination.

"We were gratified by Mr. Fish's

reception," said Bridget Barclay, Clearwater's environmental director. "He has pledged to continue to be a proactive voice and I think he will be part of the solution in Washington. We are particularly heartened by his promise to raise with EPA the issue of non-cancerous health risks

associated with PCBs."

"It was clear that Congressman Fish shares our concern that the PCB reassessment has slowed to a crawl and it continues to be urgent to move rapidly toward a decision," said Cara Lee, Scenic Hudson's environmental director.

PCBs have been found to cause cancer, birth defects, reproductive damage, impaired motor development and other neurological damage. While the EPA decision will be based partly on the carcinogenic effects of PCBs, the agency has not yet committed to include non-carcinogenic effects in the current Phase II process which evaluates the health risks to humans.

Approximately 1.3 million pounds of PCBs were discharged into the Hudson over a 30-year period by General Electric, until dumping was halted in 1977. PCBs persist in the sediment and the fish, destroying the fishing industry and posing health risks to people who consume them. In the Hudson, PCBs are concentrated in the sediments of specific areas known as "hot spots" in a 40-mile stretch from Fort Edward to Troy. These hot spots could be effectively removed from the river using a suction method of dredging which would not release contaminants into the water column.

Since the late 1970s, the Hudson River has been investigated for PCB hazards. After the advent of EPA's Superfund program to remediate the nation's worst toxic waste sites, over 200 river miles of the Hudson came under Superfund regulation, making the Hudson River the largest Superfund site in the country. Today, after

two decades of studies, the Superfund process is still studying the problem, and has only recently reached Phase II of a three-phase evaluation process. It has not yet proposed or evaluated remediation measures, and no firm deadline for a decision on remediation exists. In a 1984 interim decision the EPA put off any remedial action pending further investigation. Another decision was scheduled for this year, but was recently postponed until 1994.

The meeting with Fish included

citizens from Dutchess and Orange counties, as well as representatives from Beacon Sloop Club, Christ United Methodist Church Women's Group, Riverlovers, Scenic Hudson Inc. and Hudson River Sloop Clearwater.

