

PCBs still flow from GE plant into Hudson

BY PETER WEHRWEIN

Staff writer

HUDSON FALLS — A rock cliff under a closed General Electric capacitor factory here is oozing PCBs into the Hudson River, which could explain recent jumps in PCB levels in the river and its fish.

GE also has found PCBs at the bottom of a 100-foot-long man-made river channel at the foot of the cliff.

This fresh flow of PCBs into the Hudson from the plant has thrown a wrench into long-held views of the river's pollution problem. For years, the issue has been how to deal with the legacy of GE's past dumping of PCBs, halted over 25 years ago, and whether the contaminated river bottom ought to be dredged at the company's expense.

Now there is a new question: How much of the river's PCB pollution is coming from the Hudson Falls plant, a 150-year-old industrial site atop a 50-foot shale cliff that is riven with underground pipes, and how much is coming from the much-studied river

bottom farther downstream?

Langdon Marsh, the second-in-command at the state Department of Environmental Conservation, said Wednesday that it was too early to determine the proportion of pollution from the plant and the sediments.

Environmentalists are concerned that GE will try to shift the focus of cleanup efforts away from PCBs in the river bottom that the company says have degraded into relatively harmless compounds and do not need to be dredged.

"It is a good news, bad news joke that GE is playing on the river," said Bridget Barclay, the environmental director of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater.

Barclay also criticized EnCon, which has been overseeing an on-land cleanup of the Hudson Falls plant itself for about five years. "Apparently no one even was thinking to ask the key question, which is

Please see PCBs A-11

Continued from A-1

PCBs: GE plant still oozing

whether the PCBs can, or are getting, into the river," she said.

GE is scheduled to make a presentation on the Hudson Falls plant today at a 10 a.m. meeting of a scientific advisory committee to the Environmental Protection Agency at the Sheraton Airport Inn in Colonia. Peter Lanahan, GE's manager of

state government relations, gave a preview of the presentation on Wednesday in a phone interview with the *Times Union*.

Other areas of the Hudson Falls plant are still under investigation, said Lanahan, including an old mill building.

On Wednesday, there was another

potential PCB discovery when a GE diver found three capacitors sunk in the river near the plant, according to Marsh.

Capacitors are used to store electricity, and PCBs were formerly used in them because they are a stable, fire-retardant compound. From spills and some deliberate dumping, GE discharged between 209,000 to 1.3 million pounds of PCBs between 1957 and 1975 from its plants in Hudson Falls and another plant in the adjacent Washington County

town of Fort Edward.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, have been linked to cancer, as well as neurological and reproductive disorders. The human health threat from Hudson River PCBs comes from the accumulation in fish that people might eat. Because of PCB contamination, all fishing has been banned in Hudson for the 30 miles between Hudson Falls and Troy since 1976 and there are restrictions on commercial fishing in the lower Hudson.

The EPA was midway through an assessment of Hudson River PCB pollution when the new source became an issue. In 1991, PCB concentrations in the water a few miles below the Hudson Falls plant soared to levels last seen when there was active dumping. Then 1992 EnCon tests of fish in the Hudson above Troy revealed a big jump in contamination levels. In both cases, the results were reported in recent months.

GE started a concentrated investi-

gation of the Hudson Falls plant late last year. Lanahan said a few gallons of PCB-contaminated water trickle out of the riverside cliff each day.

Lanahan said GE will construct a system to collect the water so it does not get into the river.

The PCBs in the channel sediments are "probably going to have to be removed," said Lanahan. The channel has been blocked off by a dam, so no water is currently running through it.

70580

Albany, N.Y., Thursday, May 27, 1993

TIMES UNION

10.10553