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NEWS ARTICLE

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LTR. TO EDITOR

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## PCB study is running years late

*\$2 million project  
mushrooms to \$11M*

LEE COLEMAN  
Gazette Reporter

HUDSON FALLS — Federal environmental officials said in 1990 that their reassessment of what to do about PCBs polluting a 40-mile stretch of the Hudson River would take 10 years and cost \$2 million. Two years later, the study still isn't done and the cost is projected at \$11 million.

The river between Hudson Falls and Troy is contaminated by thousands of tons of polychlorinated biphenyls, a suspected carcinogen, from the General Electric Co. capacitor plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward. The PCBs migrated after they were discharged by the GE plants from the late 1940s until the mid-1970s.

The federal government declared the upper Hudson River PCBs contamination a Superfund site in 1983, rating the pollution rated high enough to be included on the fund's national priorities list.

Douglas Tomchuk, Environmental Protection Agency project manager, said the federally required reassessment of the EPA's 1984 "no action" decision on the upper Hudson may not be done until late 1995 or early 1996.

"We underestimated what we really thought we were getting into," Tomchuk said during a telephone conversation from his office in EPA's New York City Region II headquarters.

He said federal officials did not realize how complex the site was and

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## EPA underestimated

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the extensive amount of costly testing that would be required.

Tomchuk said most data on the river have been collected. He said the information will be reported by subcontractors, validated by EPA staff and released as a five-part site characterization report sometime this fall.

A feasibility study of the site probably won't be issued until the spring of 1995, Tomchuk said.

The final cost of the reassessment will be almost \$9 million over estimates, he said.

An EPA decision on the upper Hudson — whether to dredge the PCBs or leave them in the river or a combination of both — isn't expected until late 1995 at the earliest.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation estimated it would cost almost \$300 million to dredge the PCBs from the upper Hudson in the late 1980s. Under the Superfund law, the cost of such a cleanup could be passed on to GE.

### New source

Just as the EPA got started with its study, a "new" source of PCBs was discovered to be elevating the level of PCBs in upper Hudson river water and fish in 1991 and 1992, a development which required additional testing and review.

The new source was found to be an old mill near the Hudson Falls GE plant. GE is cleaning up the contaminated site under a consent order with the state.

"We think the process should take as long as necessary to develop the science before the EPA decides what to do."

Carl Deppe  
Hudson Falls activist

time, expense of PCB review

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To	Doug Tomchuk	From	Bill Portis
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eral Superfund program and the other is "GE's aggressive involvement and intimidation of EPA."

Barclay refers to William Greider's book, "Who Will Tell The People" (Simon & Schuster, 1992), in which Greider says GE has a special set of tactics to handle its role as a "potentially responsible party" in Superfund cases.

Griender says GE's approach is to "hang up the liability process in the tangle of court challenges ..."

"Take full advantage of every opportunity to comment ... Force the government to respond to your comments," says Griender in his book, quoting a top GE lawyer.

M. Peter Lanahan, a GE spokesman, said he had never heard of Griender's book and took exception to Barclay's claims against GE.

Lanahan said the reason GE is asking the EPA for data in the Hudson River reassessment is that the company is doing its own "several million-dollar analysis" of the river and the dynamics of PCBs biodegradation.

"We want to come up with the best analysis," Lanahan said. He said GE uses the Freedom of Information Act to obtain data from EPA.

"I don't see how that delays anything," Lanahan said.

"We have provided information to the EPA and we want the EPA to provide us with information so that the best decision can be made," Lanahan said.

#### Others not worried

Other players in the PCBs issue do not see the reassessment delay as especially harmful to the river or people.

Ann Hill DeBarbieri, a deputy commissioner with the state Department of Environmental Conservation, agreed with GE and EPA officials that the Hudson River site is a complex one, "far beyond what they [EPA] anticipated."

DeBarbieri said the 40-mile section is a "very large resource ... a moving body of water with a large area of shoreline." She added that water levels change at different times of the year, adding to the complexity.

"Our normal site is a landfill area where you know your source of contamination," DeBarbieri said. She said the river site is "extremely atypical."

"We think the process should take as long as necessary to develop the

Bridget Barclay, environmental director of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater Inc., a non-profit watchdog group headquartered in Poughkeepsie, said the reassessment delay and the scrapping of two earlier state-proposed river cleanup projects have had "serious implications."

Barclay said people continue to be exposed to PCBs through the consumption of fish, even though the state warns them not to eat the contaminated fish.

The threat of spring floods on the upper Hudson also concerns Barclay.

"PCBs are eroded from hot spots on an ongoing basis, but high water flows in the upper Hudson increase the river's scouring power and make the dispersion of the PCBs more likely," Barclay said.

She said EPA sampling last spring found significant increases in PCBs being transported downstream from PCB "hot spots" as a result of greater-than-usual snow melt and spring rains.

The Hudson River Sloop Clearwater has been a longtime proponent of dredging the PCBs from the river and disagrees with GE's contention that the PCBs are biodegrading and should be left where they are until ways of treating them in the river are completely explored.

#### Intimidating EPA?

Barclay maintains there are two reasons for the delay in reassessment: One is general flaws in the fed-

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science before the EPA decides what to do," said Carl Deppe of Hudson Falls, president of Citizen Environmentalists Against Sludge Encapsulation.

Deppe, whose group includes residents of the Fort Edward-Moreau area, keeps a close eye on the EPA process.

"The EPA is still in the middle of it, they still don't have a [scientific river] model," said Deppe.

CEASE has long opposed dredging for PCBs and burying the contaminated river sludge in a landfill in Washington County.

#### Mill cleanup ongoing

GE contractors started removing contaminated sediment from the new source of PCBs, the abandoned Allen Mill, last fall and had removed 2,100 tons of the sediment through January, according to Lanahan. The state DEC is monitoring the cleanup.

The contaminated material was placed in barrels and transported to a licensed hazardous waste disposal site, according to GE.

Tomchuk said the discovery of the new source may even help the EPA reassessment process. He said the

Phase I report included information that there was some upriver source of PCBs and this has been located.

"We didn't want to get distracted [by the new source]," Tomchuk said. He said the EPA is letting the state DEC handle the issue.

Lanahan said since the Allen Mill containment work was started last fall, there has been a "huge drop" in PCB levels at certain times of the year in the upper Hudson.

He said the tons of contaminated debris and sediment were removed from an area 400 feet long, 20 feet wide and about 15 feet deep in the old mill. He said more cleanup is required at the old mill and will be done this spring.

Lanahan said GE contractors were able to divert the river water that usually rushes through the old mill while the contaminated sediments were removed. He said more investigation of the site is necessary, including a permanent solution to PCBs-contaminated water that seeps from the banks of the Hudson near the GE plant.

This water is currently trapped by a temporary system and removed from the site for proper treatment.