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EPA will take more time to study Hudson dredging

Colonie Federal research on PCBs won't be completed until the end of 1999

By **MICHAEL GORMLEY**
Staff writer

The federal study on whether to dredge the upper Hudson River of PCBs will require another full year of research, Environmental Protection Agency officials said Tuesday.

The report is now due in December 1999. The EPA is deciding whether to reverse its 1984 decision to leave the

suspected cancer-causers buried in the sediment in the Hudson Falls-Fort Edward area. General Electric Co. was a major source of PCBs when for decades it legally dumped the material used as a fire retardant in the electric capacitors it manufactured in Hudson Falls.

Dredging of the sediment would be paid for by GE and cost about \$300 million. The company has been more in-

volved in the EPA's scientific fact-finding than other companies have been on other projects, EPA officials said. That involvement has included extensive counterarguments and scientific study by GE consultants, which the EPA has had to review and consider.

"We're going to have to defend every point in court," said Douglas J. Tomchuk, the EPA's project manager.

A GE spokesman on the project, Mark Behan, said the company's involvement has had a positive effect on the

scientific study, a point on which EPA officials are quick to agree. Behan also said the cost — \$12 million so far, according to the EPA — is one that will be paid by the company, not taxpayers.

"GE has made a very productive scientific contribution," Behan said. "If GE had not commented and raised questions, the EPA would have made several blunders."

"There have been enormous advances in science because of this tension," said EPA administrator Richard

Stapleton. However, "there's a downside for the people who want something done now."

The EPA says it is not nearly ready to make a determination on whether to dredge the river, even though some environmental groups and GE have said the agency appears to be leaning toward dredging.

Tomchuk said the EPA continues to consider several options for the river: dredging, capping the river bottom with natural and man-made material to try to trap PCB sediment there, or do nothing.

That's what GE says is the best solution, not only for the company, but for the environment. The company contends dredging would simply disperse PCBs now safely buried, a contention the EPA says is not true with new dredging technology.

PCBs have not been proven to harm humans. The EPA, citing animal testing and high levels of PCBs in fish, said the compound is a health threat that won't fade or wash away over time.