

# EPA says PCBs still very high

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COLONIE — The first major report in the federal government's multi-million dollar reassessment of the Hudson River PCBs pollution problem says the PCBs are not being reduced in any significant amount by a natural bacterial process.

But the General Electric Co. maintains its research clearly shows the PCBs in the Hudson are bio-degrading rapidly in river sediments.

The three-volume federal report also says the polychlorinated biphenyls, a suspected carcinogen, continue to pollute the river as far south as Kingston.

And most of these PCBs come from a 6-mile stretch of the river just south of the General Electric Co. plant in Fort Edward.

The report, which was released by the Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday, says that the PCB levels in the river downstream from the Thompson Island pool below Fort Edward won't "substantially decline" until the contaminated river sediment is removed or otherwise stripped of the PCBs.

The EPA report is part of its reassessment of a 1984 decision to do nothing about the PCBs currently in the river. This reassessment, which is expected to cost \$16 million, will end sometime in 1998 when the EPA will make a recommendation on what should be done with the PCBs. The EPA could, for example, recommend the PCBs be dredged

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MARC SCHULTZ Gazette Photographer  
Douglas Tomchuk, EPA project manager, points to the upstream area of the Thompson Island Dam where PCBs are concentrated during Wednesday's news conference in Colonie.

# EPA says PCBs aren't declining in the Hudson

*Report shows bacterial process hasn't been able to clean river*

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from the river; the PCBs should remain where they are; or a combination of these alternatives.

General Electric Co. could be required to pay for all or part of the river cleanup — if one is deemed necessary — under the federal environmental Superfund law.

The 6-mile stretch of the upper Hudson River between Washington and Saratoga counties is the major source of PCBs pollution to the freshwater portion of the river that extends down about 100 miles to Kingston, said Edward A. Garvey of TAMS Consultants Inc., the New Jersey firm doing some of the scientific work for the EPA.

This upper Hudson area includes General Electric Co. capacitor plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward that discharged thousands of tons of polychlorinated biphenyls into the river from the 1940s until the mid-1970s.

General Electric officials took exception to much of EPA report while a representative of the environmental group, Scenic Hudson, applauded the Phase 2 Data Evaluation and Interpretation report,

which was made public Wednesday afternoon at the Desmond Hotel in Colonie.

The conclusions in the EPA's report "are based on untested assumptions, speculation and four-year-old data," says a GE statement on the report.

"The conclusions in the report are not justified by the complete data in EPA's possession," the GE statement says.

Mark L. Behan, a GE spokesman, said much of the report is based on river data collected in 1993. The EPA said the data comes from that collected by GE, the EPA itself, New York state, and the U.S. Geological Survey and other public and private agencies.

"There have been significant changes and improvements in the river due to remediation work done [by GE] at the Hudson Falls [GE plant]," Behan said.

"EPA's report also fails to focus on the key indicator of the river's health, the condition of the fish," Behan said. The state has cautioned for years not to eat any fish from the upper Hudson River.

Douglas J. Tomchuk, the EPA's project director, said the report is

the "first one that has any real solid conclusions that the EPA is standing behind."

He said the discussion of the PCBs impact on river fish and humans will be coming in reports to be published by the EPA later this year.

"These are geo-chemical conclusions," Tomchuk said. He said the report does not make any river clean-up conclusions.

Josh C. Cleland, environmental associate for the Poughkeepsie-based Scenic Hudson, said the report points to the need for dredging the river of the PCBs.

"For us the most striking thing about this report is the detail," Cleland said.

"It clearly shows, without a doubt the hot spot sediments are releasing PCBs into the rest of the eco-system in substantial amounts," Cleland said.

The "hot spots" he referred to are about 40 locations in the upper Hudson where heavily-contaminated river sediments are located and have been for nearly 20 years according to the EPA.

Garvey and Tomchuk presented details of the new report at Wednesday night's joint liaison group meeting held at the Marriott Hotel Colonie by the EPA for groups, people on various citizen's and technical committees helping the EPA study the PCBs problem.

About 35 people, including representatives of a Washington County environmental organization strongly opposed to the PCBs dredging of Hudson, attended this presentation and asked EPA representative questions.

Copies of the massive report available for public viewing at libraries in Saratoga Springs, Glens Falls and other locations up and down the Hudson.