

THE DAILY GAZETTE

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## Activists claim GE delaying PCB cleanup

### Environmentalists picket community forum

By LEE COLEMAN  
Gazette Reporter

COLONIE — Six environmental organizations held a demonstration near the Desmond Hotel Tuesday charging that General Electric Co. is "stalling" and "stonewalling" the cleanup of PCBs in the Hudson River.

The environmentalists targeted a series of six GE community meetings at which the company discusses its latest scientific work, including a new computer model showing the "natural recovery" of the upper Hudson.

GE capacitor plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward discharged hundreds of tons of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls, a suspected carcinogen) into the Hudson from the mid-1940s until 1977, when the practice was outlawed.

The two dozen demonstrators waved posters and chanted anti-GE slogans in the Desmond parking lot near Albany-Shaker Road. They even brought two huge puppets with them: Mother Hudson and Father Hudson from Arm-of-the-Sea Theater.

The community meetings are "part

of GE's hard-core sell job," said Cara Lee, environmental director of the Poughkeepsie-based environmental watchdog organization Scenic Hudson.

She said GE's statements that the upper Hudson is undergoing a major recovery has a "subtle and devastating effect" on the reality that the upper Hudson remains a major toxic pollution site.

"GE is taking a soft-pedaling, grass-rootsy approach with these so called community meetings but it's just more of their massive hard-sell propaganda campaign to convince the public that PCBs in the Hudson River are no longer a problem," Lee said.

Some of the demonstrators later attended GE's community meeting in the Desmond and questioned the conclusions of the company's computer model of the river. The computer model projects that largemouth bass below Schuylerville could reach the U.S. Food and Drug Administration safety level of under 2 parts per million PCBs by next year.

Lee was joined at the outdoor demonstration by members of the Sierra Club, Arbor Hill Environmental Jus-

tice Corp., Environmental Advocates, Clearwater and the New York Public Interest Research Group.

Mark L. Behan, a GE spokesman, took his turn in front of the television cameras explaining GE's position on PCBs in the Hudson.

Behan said GE wants to publicize the "good news" that the Hudson is "cleaner and healthier today than it has been in 20 years."

"We are committed to the continued recovery of the Hudson," Behan said. He said the company has met "every regulatory obligation" to clean up the river.

He rebuffed the demonstrators' claims that GE was stalling or trying to delay a Hudson River cleanup.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is continuing its decade-long reassessment of a 1984 decision that nothing should be done with the PCBs in the upper Hudson. A new federal river cleanup decision is expected in 2001.

The environmental organizations want the government to force GE to spend millions of dollars to dredge

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MEREDITH L. KAISER Gazette Photographer  
Patti Kelly of Environmental Advocates yells to cars part of a protest held by several environmental groups that are concerned about PCBs in the Hudson River.

## GE defends record on PCBs

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PCBs from the bottom of the Hudson.

GE contends that dredging would do more harm than good and that the river is doing fine without such a cleanup. Local governments throughout the upper Hudson region are also against dredging.

Mayor Ernest Martin of the village of Stillwater attended GE's community meeting to say that a decade-long Hudson dredging program would be devastating to the river-centered programs and future plans

in his village.

Dr. David O. Carpenter of the University at Albany's Environmental Health and Toxicology Department said his study of PCBs indicates that the combination of chemicals "is extraordinarily toxic" and is strongly suspected of causing birth defects and behavioral problems in people who are subjected to the hazardous material in their early years.

"Our knowledge of the toxic effects of PCBs has grown much faster than the PCBs have been declining in the environment," Carpenter said during the anti-GE demonstration.