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Feds warn of PCB risks again

January 5, 2000

GE points out report is theory

By Darren O'Sullivan
Poughkeepsie Journal

Pollution in the upper Hudson River poses a considerable risk to human health and the environment far south of its original sources, according to two federal reports released Tuesday.

In an assessment of the health risks PCBs pose to people from Troy to Poughkeepsie, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that people who eat an average of one meal per week of fish

caught in the Hudson have a cancer risk 100 times higher than that set as the EPA's protection goal.

Based on conditions in which there are no institutional controls — such as fish consumption advisories and no cleanup of PCB “hot spots” in the upper Hudson — the reports are consistent with findings that focused on the upper Hudson and were released last year.

Before PCBs were banned more than 20 years ago, General Electric Corp. plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward legally discharged more than 1.1 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls into the Hudson. The EPA's study, which is expected to be finished in June 2001, could call for a cleanup of contaminated sediments in the upper Hudson that could cost up to \$1 billion.

Although there is no proven link between PCBs and cancer in humans, government agencies suspect that the industrial chemicals are linked to higher incidences of cancer and possibly to developmental abnormalities.

Report arms groups

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WHAT'S NEXT

EPA REPORT

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will discuss the findings of its reports on Jan. 11 at 7 p.m. at the Sheraton Civic Center Hotel in Poughkeepsie. There will also be a public availability session on Jan. 18 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Sheraton.

On Tuesday, environmental groups said the reports emphasize the impact PCBs are having on the entire river.

"It adds more weight to the evidence that there's a need for a cleanup of the upper Hudson," said Rich Schiafo, an environmental associate with Scenic Hudson, a Poughkeepsie-based group.

GE officials, meanwhile, said the reports are valid only in theory.

"This is a report of theoretical risk that might exist if two conditions are met," said GE spokesman Mark Behan, stressing that fish consumption advisories have been in place for many years as has a company cleanup of shoreline sources of PCBs.

Advisories limit intake

State Health Department advisories urge people to strictly limit their intake of fish caught in the Hudson south of Troy. Apart from American shad and a few other species of fish, the advisories set consumption limits below the one meal per week of fish on which the EPA based its study.

The Human Health report said that eating fish is the primary way for people to be exposed to PCBs and that risk from exposure through other means, such as swimming or drinking water from the Hudson, are significantly below EPA's level of concern.

The EPA's Ecological Risk Assessment for the lower Hudson found that PCBs may adversely affect the survival, growth and reproduction of fish in the Hudson south to New York City — as well as that of birds and mammals that eat fish — for decades to come.

While the EPA is issuing the supplemental reports on the lower Hudson, its study of the river focuses on a 40-mile stretch of the upper Hudson. Should the final decision call for a cleanup, it is expected to apply just to the upper portion.

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