

2001

P. 4
1-24-01 THR

DocId 70630

Playbook unveils GE plans to duck PCB cleanup bill

HUDSON RIVER: GE has a playbook to elude, or at least neutralize, a PCB cleanup.

By Wayne A. Hall
The Times Herald-Record
wha@th-record.com

Environmentalists have gotten hold of a General Electric memo detailing the best ways to attack the proposed \$460 million federal cleanup of PCBs in the Hudson River.

The playbook is a 1998 memo written to GE top executives by a high-paid company operative, lawyer Stephen D. Ramsey, who used to be head of environmental enforcement at the U.S. Department of Justice.

In it, Ramsey outlines a game plan to use every angle in federal law and other lawsuits that have been fought over cleanups. The memo says grassroots groups favorable to GE can help mold opinion.

Ramsey also suggests the company not ignore gaps in the EPA record of facts.

In fact, GE, which says dredging PCB "hot spots" along a 40-mile stretch of the river north of Troy would devastate the river, has launched what environmentalists call a multi-million dollar public relations campaign to assemble lots of grassroots opposition to dredging.

Recent GE moves include a pending federal lawsuit challenging the Superfund terms that make GE potentially liable for a cleanup. And GE just got an

extension of the EPA's final cleanup method decision from June to August.

That GE has a battle plan is no surprise to lawyers who duke it out with well-heeled corporations. Mitch Bernard, senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, says, "If they have jeopardy, and provided they have the resources, they would be preparing to meet the challenges."

"That's been their strategy, instead of using millions of resources (for remedial efforts), the money has gone into a campaign to avoid taking responsibility."

— Manna Jo Greene of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater

Manna Jo Greene of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, says, "that's been their strategy, instead of using millions of resources (for remedial efforts), the money has gone into a campaign to avoid taking responsibility."

The environmentalists, however, aren't distracted by GE's strategy. Last night, at an EPA sponsored public meeting at Marist College, Clearwater was going to end "the honeymoon" environmentalists gave to EPA's dredging proposal. "We applaud the plans but we think they should go further," Greene said.

And yesterday, William Smith, president of the 24,000-member Fish Unlimited, said he will try to meet with Christie Todd Whitman, expected to be the next EPA chief, to talk about options other than dredging.

General Electric discharged an estimated 1.1 million pounds of PCBs into the Hudson from two plants before the insulating fluid was banned in 1977.

On the Net: www.epa.gov/Hudson