

Press



Release

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For Immediate Release

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County Legislators Request EPA to Address PCB Contaminants Present in Hudson River

Wolfe, Cornell and Low-Hogan Urge EPA to Give Focus to a Comprehensive and Immediate Cleanup of Hudson River PCBs

New City, NY (April 16, 2015) – The Chairman of the Rockland County Legislature Alden H. Wolfe and Legislators Harriet Cornell and Nancy Low-Hogan sponsored a resolution, which received the unanimous approval of the Legislature at the April 7th meeting, to call upon the U.S. Environment Protection Agency (EPA) to facilitate an immediate and comprehensive cleanup of the Hudson River to remove highly-toxic Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) that were discharged into the river over a thirty year period by the General Electric Corporation (GE) from its Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, NY manufacturing plants. As a result, the stretch of the river from Hudson Falls to NYC has been declared a Federal Superfund site.

County Legislators passed similar resolutions in 1998 and 2001 supporting a cleanup of the PCBs and in 2002 GE entered into a consent decree with the EPA to remediate the river's sediment. GE commenced dredging in 2009 and completed its final phase in 2011. However, a 2011 report by two Federal agencies entrusted with assessing the cost of GE's liability, published reports identifying problems with the river sediment remedy established in 2002. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the US Fish and Wildlife Service determined that levels of PCBs were present in sediment adjacent to planned dredge areas, resulting in the likelihood that remediated areas would be recontaminated; and that the rate of decline of PCBs in fish was overestimated by earlier EPA models. The agencies concluded that unremediated sediment would eliminate opportunities for restoration of natural resource in locations where it would be most valuable.

PCBs are man-made organic chemical mixtures that were used in industrial and commercial products from 1929 until their manufacture was banned in 1979. According to the EPA, PCBs have been demonstrated to cause cancer, as well as a variety of other adverse health effects on the immune system, reproductive system, nervous system and the endocrine system. PCBs in the Hudson have lead to termination or damage to vital economic industries, including commercial fishing, commercial shipping and tourism.

Chairman Wolfe said, "GE's current clean-up plan does not come close to correcting the colossal ecological disaster it has caused by its discharge of PCBs into our treasured Hudson River. As federal agencies have found, this is outstanding "resource damage." I call on the EPA to demand that GE engages in a thorough remediation and not be permitted to get away with its anemic efforts, which don't come close to cleaning up this massive mess."

Rockland County Legislator Harriet Cornell, Chairwoman of the Environmental Committee, stated, "The majestic Hudson River is a world symbol, renowned for its history and its beauty. We must ensure that it's also known for its clean waters. For over twenty years I have joined with like-minded people in the Hudson Valley to fight for cleanup of the manmade, persistent and dangerous pollutants known as PCBs, which were discharged into the river by GE between 1947 and 1977. Health of humans and wildlife has been harmed; fishing and shipping industries significantly damaged economically; and the use and enjoyment of the river curtailed by the presence of PCB-contaminated soils and sediments. Once again the Rockland County Legislature calls upon GE to address its legal responsibilities and finish the job to restore the Hudson to full health and value-before dismantling the existing dredging and dewatering infrastructure. Without continued work, there is a strong risk of recontamination of previously-cleaned areas. That would be a tragedy!"

"We cannot allow our beautiful Hudson River to be recontaminated as a result of unremediated sediment," said Legislator Nancy Low-Hogan. "I urge the EPA to maintain their efforts to ensure that GE continues the critical remediation of PCBs from the Hudson River."

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