

Summary

Looks can be deceiving

Yes, the Hudson River looks clean and is teeming with fish. But the fish and the river bottom, on which they depend for food and shelter, are contaminated by PCBs. PCBs probably cause cancer and can cause other serious health problems.

The river is not cleaning itself

The PCBs are not safely buried in the sediment. They continue to move as the river flows and each day add to the pollution of the river.

The Hudson River can one day be as healthy as it is beautiful,

and the ecological benefits of cleaning up the river will be enjoyed for generations to come. But it will take the collective will of the thousands of people who cherish the river for its history, its resources and its natural beauty.

For More Information:

Visit, call, or write to the Hudson River Field Office at the address below or log on to www.epa.gov/hudson.

EPA Contacts

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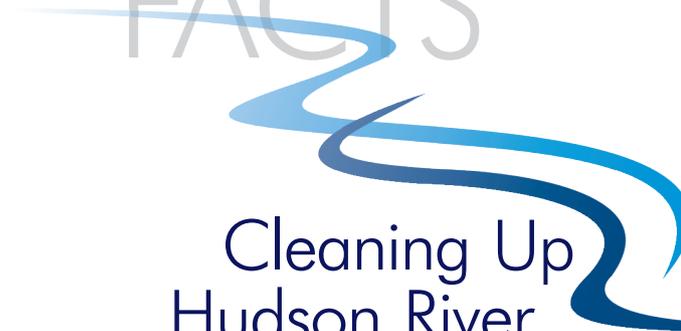
*The Field Office hours are Monday – Friday
8:00 am – 4:30 pm, with evening hours by
appointment.*

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EPA Regional Public Liaison

EPA Region 2 has designated a public liaison as a point-of-contact for community concerns and questions about the federal Superfund program in New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. To support this effort, the Agency has established a 24-hour, toll-free number that the public can call to request information, express concerns, or register complaints about Superfund. The public liaison for EPA's Region 2 office is: George H. Zachos, U.S. EPA, Region 2, 2890 Woodbridge Avenue MS-211, Edison, New Jersey 08837, (732) 321-6621, Toll-free (888) 283-7626.

JUST^{the} FACTS



Cleaning Up
Hudson River
PCBs



Hudson River
PCBs SUPERFUND SITE

The Facts

For 30 years ending in the late 1970s, the General Electric Company (GE) discharged as much as 1.3 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the Hudson River from its capacitor manufacturing plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward, New York. The PCBs remain in the river sediment. After many years of study, 40 miles of the Upper Hudson is now slated for an environmental cleanup.

PCBs are harmful to people's health.

PCBs cause cancer in laboratory animals, are considered a probable cause of cancer in people, and can trigger serious health problems, including low birth weight and reproductive and immunological problems.

Pregnant women and children are especially vulnerable.

Major national and international health organizations, including the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the American Cancer Society, and the World Health Organization agree with EPA about the toxicity of PCBs.

Eating fish from the Hudson can be dangerous.

For twenty-five years, concerns about PCBs in Hudson River fish have prompted New York State to issue health advisories that recommend limits on eating fish from the river. People should protect themselves by following state fish consumption advisories. Information is available from the New York State Department of Health (see note inside).

Women of childbearing age and children under age 15 should not eat any fish from the Hudson River.

No one should eat fish caught between the Federal Dam at Troy and Hudson Falls.

People continue to eat fish from the Hudson.

Some say the answer to the PCB problem is to just not eat the fish. This approach ignores reality.

Studies show that people who fish the river for recreation, as a cultural practice or for subsistence, continue to eat the fish they catch and bring them home to their families.

Accepting that we can't eat Hudson River fish simply writes off this important natural resource.

The river looks clean, but looks can be deceiving.

Improvements in the health of the Hudson River are visible and substantial. Thanks to the federal Clean Water Act and advances in sewage treatment, bacteria and nutrients have declined significantly, creating a healthier river environment that has encouraged the return of fish and wildlife. But the bottom line is that

PCBs in the river sediment are not visible.

It's what you can't see that can hurt you.

More PCB Facts

Although PCBs do break down, they remain in the river and are hazardous.

The enduring quality of PCBs, which made them valuable as industrial products, makes them hazardous to the environment. PCBs degrade naturally over time, but the process – called natural dechlorination – does not make them harmless. EPA considers all PCBs, regardless of their level of chlorination, to be hazardous to people's health. The PCBs may change, but they don't go away.

The Hudson River is not cleaning itself.

PCB levels in river water and fish have declined significantly since 1977, which some people offer as proof that the river is cleaning itself. But the decline is largely due to the ban on PCB discharges that went into effect that year. When direct discharges of the contaminant were stopped, PCB concentrations in river water and fish, logically, dropped as well.

PCB levels in fish are not going down.

Although PCB levels in fish have decreased over the past twenty years, the downward trend has leveled off. In fact, average PCB levels in the fish of the Upper Hudson have not changed significantly in recent years. They are still high enough to trigger restrictions on eating fish and a ban on commercial fishing.

PCBs in the sediment are not safely buried.

River sediment is continually redistributed across the bottom by erosion and river flows. This movement exposes PCB-contaminated sediment, making it available to the fish. Elevated levels of PCBs, up to 1,650 parts per million, are still found at the surface of the sediment, and 90% of the sediment cores collected in 2002 and 2003 had PCBs in the top two inches.

PCBs move throughout the river.

A sophisticated scientific technique was used to fingerprint where the PCBs come from and where they go. It enabled us to track the movement of PCBs in the sediment of the Thompson Island Pool – the most heavily contaminated section of the river – through the water, 100 miles south to Kingston. The fingerprints also reveal that the five-fold increase in PCBs, as water flows through the Thompson Island Pool, comes from the sediment.

Source control alone will not clean up the river.

Each day, about three to five ounces of PCBs enter the river at the top of the Thompson Island Pool through fractures in the bedrock underneath the GE Hudson Falls plant. Samples show that about one to two pounds of PCBs flow out of the Thompson Island Pool every day. It's simple math. The additional PCBs come from the river sediment. By turning off the Hudson Falls spigot, PCB levels in fish should go down somewhat. That's why control of the source is an important complement to EPA's cleanup plan. But without targeted dredging, PCBs in the sediment will continue to find their way into fish at unacceptable levels and for an unacceptable length of time.

Letting nature take its course will not protect people and animals who eat fish from the Hudson.

It has been suggested that if no action were taken other than source control, the levels of PCBs in fish will meet the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tolerance level of 2 ppm between 2010 and 2014. FDA standards reflect a market basket approach, which assume people eat a variety of fish from a variety of places, purchased at their local market. A PCB level of 2 ppm is not sufficient to protect people and animals who regularly eat fish from the Hudson River. That's why we have developed a risk-based concentration of .05 ppm as our goal for PCBs in fish. That is also the advisory level for unrestricted consumption accepted for the Great Lakes.

Hudson River PCB Superfund Site Map



Note: Information about Hudson River and New York State fishing advisories can be found by calling 1-800-845-1158 ext. 27815 or online at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/fish/fish.htm>