



## PCBs and the Upper Hudson River Floodplain Information Sheet

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Region 2: NJ, NY, PR, VI • 290 Broadway, New York, NY 10007

### Introduction

Sediments within the Upper Hudson River are contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) as a result of industrial discharges that occurred between the 1940s and 1970s. PCBs were discharged to the river from the General Electric (GE) plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward and were subsequently transported downstream. Once PCBs entered the river, they were deposited and mixed with the sediments at many locations on the river bottom and at some locations along the shoreline. In 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) signed a Record of Decision (ROD) for the cleanup of the Hudson River PCBs Superfund Site. The PCB-contaminated sediments on the river bottom are being remediated as part of the Hudson River dredging project currently underway. The ROD also states that concerns related to possible exposure of residents and ecological receptors to PCBs in the floodplain must be evaluated. This information sheet is intended to provide you with information that will help you to minimize your potential exposure to PCB-contaminated soils in floodplain areas along the Hudson River between Fort Edward and the Troy Dam.



### Deposition of PCBs in Floodplain Areas

The river is a dynamic system that has the ability to pick-up, carry, and move river bottom sediments, some of which may contain PCBs, further downstream. During periods of flooding, fine-grained sediments, and any PCBs that they contain, may be deposited above the riverbank upon the floodplain and become part of the soil. Certain areas of the floodplain are more likely to accumulate PCB-contaminated soil. These include low-lying areas right next to the river that are subject to frequent flooding, backwater areas, and areas on the inside of large bends in the river. In many instances, soils within floodplain areas may appear wet and muddy throughout the year. It is these areas where flooding occurs and floodplain deposits accumulate that people may be exposed to soils contaminated with PCBs.

### Floodplain Sampling

Since 2002, EPA and GE have collected approximately 5,000 soil samples from floodplain areas of the Hudson. The results of the sampling will be used to supplement a comprehensive Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study.

Previous years' results have been reported to EPA and distributed to private land owners. All of the data collected to date have been compiled into a set of Data Summary Reports that are available at the EPA Region 2 Hudson River Field Office, 421 Lower Main Street, Hudson Falls, NY, 12839. The reports detail sample collection procedures and all investigation analytical results.

Based on those results, GE, with oversight from EPA, has taken actions to reduce the potential for people to be exposed to PCBs in floodplain soils.

These actions have been taken where elevated levels of PCBs have been detected in areas that people use on private and some public properties. The actions have consisted primarily of the installation of cover material to prevent direct contact with PCBs or the placement of signage to warn people that PCBs are present. GE and EPA will continue to evaluate the necessity of taking additional actions to address potential exposures as the project moves forward.

### **Minimizing Exposure to PCBs in Floodplain Soil**

In the Hudson River floodplains, the best way people can reduce their exposure to PCBs is to be aware that PCBs may exist in soils in frequently flooded areas near the river banks edge and to take simple precautions when using these areas. The New York State Department of Health recommends that people take the following precautions:

- Children may come into direct contact with PCB-contaminated soil while playing or digging in the floodplain soil. To reduce potential exposures, children's hands, feet and toys should be washed after playing or digging in the dirt, especially before eating.

- Avoid tracking soil and mud from potentially contaminated areas into your home by rinsing off shoes that may have sediment or soil on them. Additionally, wipe your pet's feet before it enters your home.
- Avoid digging in and relocating soil from the areas where frequent flooding occurs.
- Wash soil from skin whenever possible, especially after working in areas where flooding occurs. To further reduce exposures, minimize skin contact while working in soil by wearing clothing such as gloves, shoes, and long pants to minimize soil contact.
- Gardening and eating homegrown vegetables are not major sources of PCB exposure for most people. This is because PCBs are generally found in low-lying areas next to the river, which are usually not good for residential gardening due to frequent flooding. Should you choose to garden in a low-lying area next to the river be sure to thoroughly wash and/or peel vegetables grown there. This will help to remove soil that adheres to the vegetables.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What are PCBs?

PCBs are a group of chemicals consisting of 209 individual chemicals. PCBs were widely used as a fire preventive and insulator in the manufacture of electrical transformers and capacitors because of their exceptional ability to withstand high temperatures. At the concentrations detected in the sediments and fish, people are unlikely to be aware of PCBs by their smell or taste. Many commercial PCB mixtures are known in the U.S. by the trade name Aroclor.

### Every spring the river floods my yard, does this mean that there are PCBs in my yard?

PCBs may be present in areas that have been flooded in the past and that may be subject to frequent flooding by the river. Residents can reduce the potential for exposure to PCBs by following the precautions indicated above when in areas that are frequently flooded by the river.

### What are the health effects associated with contact to PCBs?

PCBs have been extensively evaluated for their toxicity in animal studies and human epidemiological studies of workers and the general population. PCBs cause many effects in animals. In humans, skin conditions, such as chloracne and rashes, have occurred in workers exposed to high levels of PCBs. PCBs are suspected of causing a variety of other effects in humans. Information on other effects, risk, and toxicity of PCBs is available at two EPA websites:

- (1) visit <http://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris/index.cfm?fuseaction=iris.showSubstanceList> for separate information on Aroclors 1254 and 1016 and PCBs in the EPA Integrated Risk Information System, a consensus database of toxicity information developed by EPA.
- (2) visit <http://www.epa.gov/udson/faqs.htm> at the USEPA Region 2 Hudson River PCBs website for Frequently Asked Questions about PCB Health Risks. Additional information can be found at two websites of the U.S. Agency for



Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR):

- (1) visit <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/index.asp> for the Toxicological Profile for PCBs
- (2) visit <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp> for the ToxFAQs for PCBs

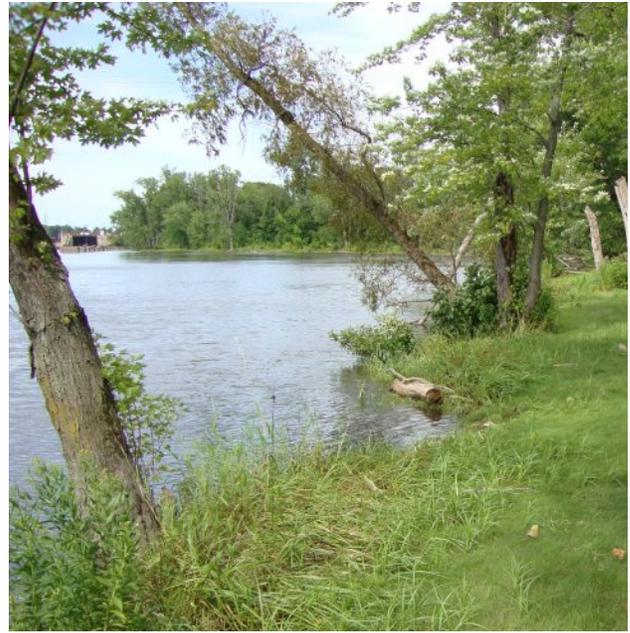
As with all chemical exposures, the nature and extent of any health effects from PCBs are related to the amount and duration of chemical exposure. In addition, people differ in their response to the same or similar exposures. This difference in sensitivity is due, in part, to the individual differences among people. People, for example, differ in age, sex, diet, family traits, lifestyle, genetic background, the presence of other chemicals in their body (e.g., alcohol, prescription drugs), and state of health. Differences in sensitivity should be kept in mind when reading the information on the human health effects of any chemical including PCBs.

### Can I fish in the river?

Yes, you can fish in the river, but due to PCB contamination you should not eat the fish or share them with others. Be aware that New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) "Catch-and-Release" regulations require that all fish caught from the Hudson River between Bakers Falls (in Hudson Falls) and the Federal Dam at Troy must be immediately returned to the water unharmed. Equally important, the New

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York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has issued extensive fish advisories for most of the Hudson River due to elevated PCB levels in fish. The NYSDOH advisories recommend that no one eat any fish caught between South Glens Falls and the Troy Dam. PCB exposures from eating contaminated fish are greater than those arising from contact with contaminated floodplain soil and hence pose a greater health concern. For additional fish advisory information for New York State waters (including the entire Hudson River) call NYSDOH's toll free information line at 1-800-458-1158 (select option 6) or view the fish advisories online at <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/fish/fish.htm>.



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**For additional information contact:**

❖ **Ms. Larisa Romanowski**  
EPA Hudson River Field Office  
421 Lower Main Street  
Hudson Falls, NY 12839  
(518) 747-4389  
(866) 615-6490 Toll-Free

❖ **Mr. William Shaw**  
NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
625 Broadway  
Albany, New York 12233-7013  
(518) 402 – 9676

❖ **Mr. Justin Deming**  
NYS Department of Health  
547 River Street  
Troy, New York 12180  
(518) 402-7860  
1-800-458-1158, (select option 6) Toll-Free