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Both sides of the Hudson River dredging argument have been very vocal.

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The Hudson River dredging debate

ALBANY, N.Y., Feb. 16 – You've seen the commercials. You've heard the Environmental Protection Agency findings. And now you're more confused than ever over dredging the Hudson River of dangerous PCBs.

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By John Allen

FROM LOOKING AT the river, you'd never know. But they are there – PCBs.

Should you care? University at Albany researcher Dr. David Carpenter says, absolutely.

“The evidence affirms that PCBs cause cancer, cause suppression to the immune system, cause reductions in IQ and shortened attention span in children exposed before birth, cause suppression of thyroid function and disrupt sex steroid function, especially in children born to mothers that have contamination and that these effects may be irreversible,” Dr. Carpenter said.

“The levels of PCBs of fish in the upper Hudson are at

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least ten times larger than the fish in Lake Ontario and Lake Michigan where we have very good evidence on children and mothers that eat the fish," he added.

That evidence included reduced IQs of up to six points in the children of these mothers.

According to Carpenter, if you eat one fish from the Hudson you get more PCBs in that one meal than anyone else in the country will get all year long from eating ocean fish from the supermarket, beef, pork and chicken.

In fact, the state placed a total ban 25 years ago on eating fish in the upper Hudson and stringent guidelines on eating fish in the rest of the river.

"A \$40 million a year commercial fishing industry along the Hudson River [was] completely wiped out by these discharges," said environmental advocate and Washington County resident David Higby.

"It's only fair that the person that is responsible for that be made to pay," he said.

It should be noted that PCBs can be found in animals and nearly all of us. The problem is the amount of PCBs in your body.

The EPA wants General Electric to foot the \$450 million cleanup bill. But GE, who in addition to mounting a massive anti-dredging advertising blitz, says they have been cleaning up the river by slowing down considerably the amount of PCBs still seeping into the upper Hudson.

(General Electric is a partner in MSNBC.)

"This company has spent nearly \$200 million on a cleanup project in the upper Hudson that has reduced PCB levels by 90 percent," GE spokesman Mark Behan said.

They're doing that by pumping PCBs out of the bedrock at the old Hudson Falls plant.

"We have a whole series of wells that we have installed between the river and the plant site," explained GE Hudson Falls Project Manager John Haggard.

Those wells are pumping water, oil and PCBs out of the river. But the EPA and environmentalists say that is correcting only a small part of the problem and that the majority of PCBs still coming from the upper Hudson into the lower are those lying in the sediment that only dredging can remove.

In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, GE dumped more than 1 million pounds of PCBs into the Hudson from their capacitor plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward. Even though the dumping was legal at the time, a court ruled GE did exceed the limits of its permits. The dumping stopped in 1977 when their manufacture was for the most part banned in the U.S.

According to Carpenter, "The reason for that is that it was discovered at that time that PCBs remained in the environment very much like DDT – a useful compound, but it



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The effect of the PCBs in the water has been a subject of debate. NewsChannel 13's John Allen reports.

didn't go away.”
 And neither is the controversy.

TO DREDGE OR NOT TO DREDGE

It's an issue that has divided the communities along the Hudson. To remove dangerous PCBs or leave them where they've been for decades, deep in the sediment of the river floor.

Under the Superfund law, the EPA wants GE to pay to dredge to the tune of \$450 million.

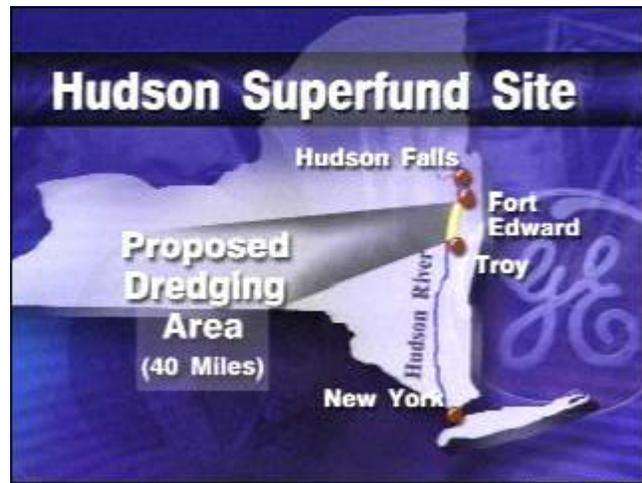
But many of those who live in the 40-mile zone where the dredging would actually happen say they don't want their river touched. People down river and most environmentalists are vastly in favor.



WHYT

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Whether or not the PCBs have actually been moving down the river has been a hot-button issue. NewsChannel 13's John Allen reports.



Steve Anderson / WNYT

“Our position is you need to remove the PCBs from the river bed,” said Chris Ballantyne of the Sierra Club. He said not dredging the river would be, “somewhat akin to an oncologist, a cancer doctor, saying there's a big tumor on your chest, but I don't want to go in and remove it because it's going to make a big mess.”

Fort Edward Town Supervisor Marilyn Pulver disagrees. “To go back and dredge it at this point in time when the sediments are being covered, that to me doesn't make any sense and most people I talk to in this community entirely agree,” she said.

And they are making their voices known. They claim removing the PCBs would not only disrupt the economy along the Hudson, it would destroy the ecology of the river. They say, why stir up the sediment when the river is doing a better job of cleaning itself?

GE agrees and has spent millions of dollars on a massive advertising campaign trying to convince you that dredging doesn't work.

“We think [dredging is] the wrong approach. There's a better more effective cleanup process in place now and it



WHYT

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NewsChannel 13's political commentator Dr. Alan Chartock and Ed Dague discuss the politics of PCBs.

should not be replaced by dredging,” Behan said.

That cleanup process includes pumping PCBs out of the bedrock at the old Hudson Falls capacitor plant.

“PCBs and water are drawn out [of wells] and pumped up to our treatment plant, where the PCBs are removed and the water is subsequently discharged back into the river,” Haggard explained.

GE says this process has reduced the amount of PCBs flowing into the Hudson to just three ounces a day. That, along with their claim that PCBs already in the upper Hudson are trapped in the sediment and not moving, puts them at odds with the EPA study.

The federal dam in Troy separates the upper Hudson from the lower. According to the EPA, 1.3 pounds of PCBs travel from the upper Hudson into the lower everyday.

So where is the remaining pound of PCBs coming from? GE says the EPA uses fuzzy math.

The EPA says it's coming from the sediment on the river bottom. Therefore, according to the EPA, we must dredge – even though they admit that dredging will only remove about half of the PCBs in the upper Hudson.

Still, according to Carpenter, any amount dredged is better than none at all.

“The main reason that it's so important that we get what we can out, is that all of the evidence from the human health studies show that more is worse,” Carpenter said.

GE has a plan that they will be presenting to the state to dig tunnels under the river and drill even more wells to pump PCBs from the bedrock in Hudson Falls. They say by doing this they can completely eliminate any more PCBs from entering the Hudson.

The EPA says this still doesn't address what they see as the major issue of PCBs that are already in the river sediment, which in their opinion only dredging can eliminate.



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Many who live on the river worry about how dredging will disrupt life, while others feel the disruption is worth it. NewsChannel 13's John Allen reports.

THE PEOPLE SPEAK OUT

The Hudson River is magnificent in its size, majestic in its beauty – and saturated with PCBs. Still, it's a lifeline for the people who live and work on its banks.

The six-mile area of the Thompson Island Pool in Fort Edward is where the EPA plans the most intensive dredging,

“It would knock the bottom out of the water-based tourism industry,” Neil Orsini said. He owns the Anvil Restaurant on the banks of the Thompson Island Pool. “It would eradicate it. You want to be on your boat with your family in the middle of the largest environmental dredging project in the history of the world?” he asked.

Many people who live along the upper Hudson feared the PCB laden sediment would be taken from the river only to be placed in landfills in their communities. The EPA has

repeatedly said the sediment would go to approve toxic waste sites, located outside the Hudson Valley region.

But many don't believe it.

“It is partly a matter of trust with what they're going to do, with what they say. And they're evasive. They don't really say, have any real concrete answers of what they're going to do with what they're dredging out of the river,” said Lorraine Dickinson, a Washington County dairy farm owner.

There are other voices on the upper Hudson who say dredging could only improve an economy that at best is a struggling one.

“This yacht basin has not been navigationally dredged [because of the PCB's] in 22 years and that's why it's silted in to the degree it is,” Pamela Brooks, a Fort Edward resident, said.

The EPA has placed a moratorium on navigational dredging until the PCB issue is resolved – including the Fort Edward Yacht Basin, where large vessels already have trouble passing through.

It would be hard to deny that the river isn't vastly cleaner than it was 30 or 40 years ago. Industries and municipalities no longer dump their waste into to the river. And thousands of people recreate in its waters every year.

But just because the water's clear doesn't mean it's clean. In other words, don't believe your eyes. Carpenter says, don't believe every research study you read as well.

“But the scientific community is in clear consensus on the health effects with the exception of the few scientists that have financial conflicts,” Carpenter said.

“I really feel that as adults we have to look at this mighty resource that we have. We have to buck up and be disrupted if need be for our children, our grandchildren,” Brooks added.

So what happens if the EPA decides to go on with their plan to dredge?

“I can tell you what will happen. The people of the upper river will not let this happen,” Pulver said. “It will end in the courts, there is no doubt in my mind.”

GE already has a suit in federal court, which, if upheld, would overturn Superfund law.

Much could also be riding on new EPA Administrator, and former New Jersey Gov., Christie Todd Whitman. Pro-dredgers are pinning their hopes on her to stay the EPA course on dredging, while those opposed say Whitman and the Bush administration could be the trump card they need to, at the very least, delay a dredging decision.



Do you support dredging the Hudson River?

Yes, dredging is the best way to cleanup the PCBs

No, dredging is not the best solution

Not sure

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Hudson PCB facts

Facts about the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposed plan for dredging PCBs in the upper Hudson River:

- Approximately 2.65 million cubic yards of sediment will be removed from the Thompson Island pool (1.56 million cubic yards), the area between the Thompson Island Dam and the Northumberland Dam (0.58 million) and areas between the Northumberland Dam and the Federal Dam at Troy (0.51million).
- Treated and stabilized sediments will be transported by rail to landfills out of the area.
- The navigation channel will be dredged as needed to implement the cleanup and to keep existing canal traffic moving during the project.
- Environmental dredging techniques will be used to minimize and control the release of sediments during dredging.
- Dredged areas will be refilled with approximately one foot of clean material to isolate residual PCB contamination and restore habitat.
- Monitoring of sediments in dredged and unremediated areas will take place.
- Water removed from the dredged sediments will be treated and discharged back into the river.
- Fish, water and sediments will be monitored to determine when preliminary remediation goals are reached.
- Modified fish consumption advisories will continue, as appropriate.
- PCBs still entering the river through fractures in the bedrock beneath the GE Hudson Falls plant will be controlled.
- The cleanup plan will be reevaluated every five years.

Associated Press

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