

GE: Limit PCB contamination during Hudson dredging

March 8 2010, By MICHAEL HILL , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- General Electric Co. on Monday proposed a halting further dredging of the Hudson River if PCBs churned up by the work spread too much pollution downriver during the second phase of an ongoing cleanup.

GE made the proposal as the company and the federal [Environmental Protection Agency](#) were set to release separate reports assessing the dredging in 2009 of PCB "hot spots" north of Albany. The EPA had yet to release its report Monday afternoon, but the agency has been much more upbeat in its assessments of the dredging than GE, which is paying for the [cleanup](#).

Proposals in both reports will be considered by a peer review panel, which will make recommendations this summer to the EPA on how to continue the federal Superfund project.

Last year's dredging was a test run for the far larger Phase 2 of the cleanup, a projected five-year project on 40 miles of river north of Albany that regulators want to start next year. The EPA wants a total of 2.65 million cubic yards of [sediment](#) removed from the river.

Crews working the river last summer found contamination of the river bed was deeper than expected and the work took longer.

GE said PCBs kicked up into the water during dredging presented a serious problem. So the company proposed setting a "hard cap" on the

amount of PCBs that would be allowed to flow downstream during Phase 2. Crews would start by targeting the contaminated areas that otherwise would be most likely to pollute fish downriver.

"(T)o send more PCBs downriver than would happen without dredging eliminates the benefits of the remedy identified by EPA," the GE report said.

GE spokesman Mark Behan called the proposal a "smarter, more targeted approach." Still, it could result in work being stopped before meeting the EPA's removal target.

PCBs, or [polychlorinated biphenyls](#), are considered probable carcinogens. GE plants in Fort Edward and neighboring Hudson Falls discharged wastewater containing PCBs for decades before the lubricant and coolant was banned in 1977.

The EPA was expected to call for more modest changes in the plan, such as recalculated productivity targets and tighter control on silt control.

"The completion of the first phase of dredging, while not without problems, has gone very well and is moving us closer to achieving the goal of a cleaner [Hudson River](#)," EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck said in a prepared release. "The problems in Phase 1 will be addressed during the careful scientific review, which is now underway."

[General Electric](#) will not disclose projected costs, though others estimate it could exceed \$700 million.

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