Hudson River Floodplain Sampling: 2016 Season

Hudson River PCBs Superfund Site

Community Update **July 2016**

For more information:

For questions, comments or for more information about the Hudson River floodplain investigation or the Hudson River PCBs Superfund site, you can contact:

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What are PCBs?

PCBs are a group of chemicals consisting of 209 individual compounds known as congeners. PCBs were sold in mixtures containing dozens of congeners. These commercial mixtures were known in the U.S. as Aroclors. 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 degradation at high temperatures. Production was banned by the United States Congress in 1979. PCBs are classified by EPA as probable human carcinogens and are linked to other adverse health effects such as developmental effects, reduced birth weights and reduced ability to fight infection. More EPA information about PCBs is available at https://www.epa.gov/pcbs.

This summer/fall, soil sampling will be conducted to test for the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in shoreline areas of the Upper Hudson River that may be subject to flooding, called the floodplain. The study area includes the 43-mile stretch of the Upper Hudson River floodplain located between Hudson Falls and Troy, NY.

Sampling is being conducted by the General Electric Company under a 2014 agreement with the EPA. In the coming months, GE's contractors will be contacting more than 400 property owners in the floodplain to request permission to sample their properties. Property owners who sign the voluntary access agreement give permission to GE's contractors to collect soil samples on their property. GE will sample properties at no cost to owners and will restore the ground after the sampling is completed. GE's contractors will contact owners to schedule the sampling and answer any questions. Residents do not need to be present for the sampling.

The floodplain work is being conducted under EPA oversight. The EPA encourages floodplain residents who are contacted by GE to sign and return their access consent form for this important sampling work as soon as possible.

The EPA will evaluate the results to determine whether PCBs in the soil pose an unacceptable risk to residents and whether any follow up action is required. Property owners will receive a copy of the sampling results and a map showing the sample locations.

Additional sampling events are planned for the future as part of the comprehensive investigation of the floodplain.

Taking a soil sample is a simple and routine process. Samples are collected using hand tools (such as hand auger) and result in a 2-inch diameter hole. After each sample is taken, the hole is filled in. Because near surface soil generally represents the greatest potential risk to human health and the environment, samples will typically be taken to a depth of 1 foot. Some deeper samples may be collected.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why is sampling needed and how will the data be used?
The sampling is part of a comprehensive investigation, called a Remedial Investigation/ Feasibility Study (RI/FS). The goal of the RI/FS is to determine the nature and extent of the PCB contamination in the Upper Hudson River floodplain, identify potential human health and environmental risks, and evaluate options for cleaning up the site. The data will be used in conjunction with existing data to determine where PCBs are present and improve EPA's understanding of the distribution of PCBs in the Upper Hudson River floodplain. More information about the RI/FS for the Hudson River floodplain and the Superfund cleanup process is available in a fact sheet: http://www.epa.gov/hudson.

The data collected from the sampling will be used to evaluate the risk of exposure to PCBs to both humans and biota (plants and animals). These risk assessments will be used to support the evaluation of cleanup approaches to address contamination at the site.

Will my property be sampled?
Not all properties will be sampled as part of the data collection effort. Sample locations will be selected based on the likelihood that PCBs are present due to frequency of flooding, location along the river, and how the area floods. Depending on the location and characteristics of a property, GE may contact a property owner to request access to conduct soil, sediment or biota sampling. Multiple visits to a property could occur so that the presence of PCBs can be better evaluated.

Will any actions be taken if PCBs are found on my property?
The Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) is the first step in the long-term cleanup of the site. The EPA will use the information from the RI/FS to determine if a cleanup is needed on your property. Prior to the completion of the multi-year study, actions will be taken as necessary to address immediate threats to people or the environment. In the past, in the Upper Hudson River floodplain, these actions have primarily consisted of the installation of topsoil and grass cover material to prevent direct contact with PCBs. Signs to warn people that PCBs are present have been placed in less used areas. These actions are considered temporary.

Minimizing Exposure to PCBs in Floodplain Soil

Considering that PCBs could be present at any given location in the floodplain, residents should take simple precautions to minimize potential exposures when spending time in floodplain areas. In the Hudson River floodplain, the best way people can reduce their exposure to PCBs is to be aware that PCBs may exist in soil in frequently flooded areas near the riverbank's 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 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 remove soil that adheres to the vegetables.