

## A GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

**PCBs**—polychlorinated biphenyls, a hazardous synthetic chemical used by GE

**ATSDR**—Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**EPD**—Environmental Protection Division of Georgia's Department of Natural Resources, the state authority supervising cleanup

**EPA**—the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the federal authority supervising cleanup

**DNR**—Georgia's Department of Natural Resources, issues fishing licenses and distributes fish consumption guidelines

**FDA**—U.S. Food and Drug Administration, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**POPs**—Persistent Organic Pollutants, 12 chemicals and pesticides named in an international treaty signed by the U.S.

**Ppm**—parts per million, a measurement of PCB-levels in soil and other substances

**Ppb**—parts per billion, a measurement of PCB-levels in ground-water and other substances

**Pyranol**—the PCB-laden oil used in the manufacture of General Electric transformers

**Karst**—the geology beneath the GE site. Primarily limestone with fissures, sinkholes, underground streams and caverns.

**Stormwater**—Water that flows during rain events to streams and rivers carrying soil and pollutants

**Groundwater**—Water that is found underground and in the fissures of karst geology

**Sediment**—Organic and inorganic particles washed off the land and transported to streams and rivers by stormwater.

# Rome PCB Cleanup has global implications

In May 2001, the U.S. joined officials from 90 other countries in signing the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The goal of the treaty is to eliminate PCBs and 11 other hazardous pollutants referred to as the "dirty dozen" from the global environment.

Since the signing of the treaty, 24 countries, including Canada and Mexico, have ratified the treaty. President George W. Bush hailed the treaty after its signing, but last fall as the Senate was set to ratify the treaty, the administration blocked ratification when it objected to provisions about how POPs not included in the "dirty dozen" would be added to the treaty. At least 50 countries must ratify it for it to be put in force.

The treaty puts PCB contaminated sites like GE-Rome at ground zero of this daunting international effort. While most of the targeted toxic chemicals have already been banned from production in developed countries, the far-traveling nature and persistence of substances like PCBs makes cleanups like the one taking place here a top priority of the treaty.

While PCBs have not been manufactured in the U.S. since 1977, their chemical make up permits them to wander in the global environment like toxic gypsies. They easily cycle between air, water and soil, and PCB 1260, the primary PCB used at GE's Rome facility, is among the most long-lived of the many PCB varieties, reports the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry in its Toxicological Profile for PCBs.

These characteristics, combined with PCBs' affinity for traveling up the food chain and accumulating in the largest predators, makes the toxic substance a world traveler. A molecule of PCB left in the environment here may someday find its way into a striped bass in the Coosa River or an American eel in the Atlantic ocean; it may end up in an otter in Big Cedar Creek or a polar bear at the Arctic Circle; it may settle in a Garden Lakes resident whose home is treated with Pyranol or in a Native American in Alaska.

PCBs volatilized from soil and water tend to drift to higher latitudes before returning to Earth as rain or snow, resulting in elevated levels of PCBs in Arctic wildlife. Studies of indigenous people who survive on wild food in the Arctic show that breast-fed babies of these Native people take in seven times more PCBs than the typical infants in Canada and the U.S.

These studies and others led to the creation of the POPs treaty, and U.S. endorsement of the treaty is a clear mandate for GE and the Rome community.

For more information about how PCBs cycle in the global environment, see *Our Stolen Future* by Theo Colborn, Dianne Dumanoski and John Peterson Myers. The book is available through most major bookstores and at the Rome-Floyd County Library. A copy is also available for review at CRBI's office at 408 Broad Street.

## GE's Toxic Legacy in Other Communities

How do you spell relief? When it comes to PCBs, Rome's relief may be spelled N-PL as in National Priority List (NPL).

The NPL is a list of hazardous waste sites that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) deems highly important to clean up. When sites are added to this list, they are on track to be regulated by the much stronger federal Superfund legislation, though being placed on the list does not necessarily lead to a Superfund designation.

In other communities where General Electric has left a toxic legacy, NPL status has speeded cleanups and helped communities recover from the contamination.

In Pittsfield, Massachusetts where GE produced electrical capacitors and transformers on a 250-acre facility from 1903 to the mid 1980s, residents saw little clean up action for nearly 20 years under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)—(also the current framework for the Rome-GE site). Similar to the plodding cleanup here, that long period of relative inaction resulted in continuing contamination of neighborhoods and the Housatonic River.

In Pittsfield, NPL status resulted in a strong consent decree that included a comprehensive cleanup and compensation to the city for losses of tax revenue. Under the negotiated decree, GE must pay the city \$10 million over 10 years to fund redevelopment projects.

GE has also agreed to clean up contaminated areas, and dredge a portion of the Housatonic River.

EPA estimates that the settlement is worth \$500 to \$700 million in remediation and compensation.

All this action came under the NPL. GE-Pittsfield has never reached Superfund status.

The communities of New York's Hudson River Valley are also getting some relief from PCB contamination thanks to federal intervention. In 2002, EPA issued its final decision requiring GE to remove more than 100,000 pounds of PCBs from targeted hotspots on the upper Hudson River through environmental dredging.

In Rome, state environmental officials expect a complete cleanup to take decades.

Last July, Georgia Environmental Protection Division director Harold Reheis asked EPA to take over the Rome cleanup, but objections from GE and the desire of local officials to keep the cleanup at the state level resulted in a compromise in which EPA agreed to work with GE and EPD.

A failure of this arrangement could ultimately result in a full federal takeover. Based on Pittsfield's experience, this could finally bring Romans some PCB R-E-L-L-I-E-F.

