



# RED CROW NEWS

EPA, GE, GREAT BARRINGTON MA, HOUSATONIC RIVER, MASS DEP, MICKEY FRIEDMAN, PCBs

## Rise Up for Rising

by [Mickey Friedman](#) • March 26, 2016 • [1 Comment](#)

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Like many stories, the story about the Lenox or Lee or Housatonic PCB Dump begins and ends with money. The money Monsanto made selling PCBs to GE and Westinghouse. The massive amounts of money GE made selling transformers. So much money, it made no sense to acknowledge how dangerous it was to work with PCBs. How dangerous it was to let PCBs out into the universe.

So all of us have toxic PCBs. Polar bears, people, salmon and the American eagle.

Many of you missed the battle to find justice for the GE workers who were poisoned as they built capacitors and transformers. Didn't know GE trucked PCB-contaminated fill everywhere it could. Missed the battle to clean up contaminated neighborhoods and the Dorothy Amos children's park in Pittsfield.

Most of you have never been to the Allendale Elementary School to see the massive PCB dumps across the street.

Well it's those dumps that have set the precedent for the PCB dump that could be coming your way. Because, in return for the cleanup of two miles of the Housatonic River, your Environmental Protection Agency decided to let GE put massive amounts of PCB-contaminated river bank soil and river sediment next door to an elementary school rather than send it far away.

Because that saved GE a fortune. Saved EPA a long drawn out court battle. So they compromised and gave us the Consent Decree of 2000. Some of us protested. I wrote a brief for the Housatonic River Initiative contesting the terms of the Consent Decree in Federal District Court. When the proverbial it hit the fan. And the very powerful howled and raged about how HRI was wrecking the chances for compromise and progress and and and. Bankers and mayors and politicians. I can remember how we were summoned to Boston to

meet with folks from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (more a joke today than yesterday) and their Connecticut counterparts and a gaggle of EPA folks and lo and behold a small elite unit of arrogant attorneys up from Washington from the Department of Justice.

It wasn't until then that I fully understood that the real decisions about the Housatonic River and exactly how much or how little GE had to do and had to spend to do it would be made in DC. Sitting there I couldn't help but flash back to the photo I had seen of the President Bill Clinton on a golf cart smiling with Jack Welch, then the CEO of GE. Needless to say, the Justice Department wasn't happy that a bunch of earnest local environmentalists might mess up their mega-deal. Unfortunately I was in the minority while the majority of the Board of HRI decided to end our court battle in return for a promise the EPA would actively explore treating PCB wastes rather than landfilling them the next time around, when it came to cleaning the Rest of the River. A promise, sixteen long years later, that's proven to be worthless.

Which brings us back to money and why there's a very good chance GE will get its dump in South County.

Because even though CERCLA, EPA's authorizing legislation calls for it, EPA won't insist on the kind of alternative remedial technology that would treat PCB contaminated river bank soil and river sediment. Because even though CERCLA unequivocally states: "The offsite transport and disposal of hazardous substances or contaminated materials without such treatment should be the least favored alternative remedial action where practicable treatment technologies are available" the EPA is telling GE to transport its PCB wastes across the country. Which means GE is being asked to spend close to \$250 million more than it wants to spend. Money it wouldn't have to spend if the EPA lets it do exactly what the EPA let GE do the last time around. Build a PCB dump as close to the River as possible.

I spent ten years of my life trying to tell a story about GE and PCBs and the people who worked with them. And along the way it turned into a story about the river that was poisoned. I spent many a day filming the Housatonic. From the small bridge in Lakewood, the Newell Street Bridge, the Lyman Street Bridge, down in Great Barrington by the River Walk. But my favorite spot is Rising Pond when the sun starts to set in Housatonic and Rising sparkles. It breaks my heart to imagine the PCB dump beside it.

Last time, Bill Clinton. This time, maybe Hillary. Who on January 6, 2014 spoke to GE for \$225,000.

Who knows what would have happened if you had fought against the Hill 78 Dump in Pittsfield?

Who knows what will happen if you fight for your communities?

I say Rise Up for Rising Pond.

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You can see Mickey Friedman's "Good Things To Life: GE, PCBs and Our Town" on Youtube:

<https://youtu.be/ACN6CpMqt1w>

Depending on your computer, you may have to use headphones or earbuds to hear both channels of the