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For Immediate Release

RIVER ADVOCATES APPEAL EPA'S RECENT DECISION TO LEAVE LARGE AMOUNTS OF TOXIC PCBs IN THE HOUSATONIC RIVER

The Housatonic River Initiative, Inc. (HRI), a grassroots community organization working since 1992 to pressure the General Electric Company (GE) to clean the Housatonic River of its toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), has challenged the recent EPA decision for the Rest of River before the EPA's Environmental Appeals Board (EAB) in Washington, DC. (EAB Docket No MAD002084093.)

There is no such thing as a 'safe level' of PCBs, the man-made cancer causing, endocrine disrupting chemicals GE used at its transformer plant in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Unfortunately, they become more concentrated as they bio-accumulate and move up the food chain. PCB exposures at even low levels can cause development effects, suppress the immune system, disrupt hormone function, retard growth, decrease sperm counts and much more.

People are exposed to PCBs by three routes: ingestion, for example, when people eat PCB-contaminated fish; through skin or dermal absorption; and inhalation, when PCBs volatilize, and go into the air. Unfortunately, due to the world-wide transport of these persistent organic pollutants, the people and wildlife of the Arctic, even though they live where no PCBs were used, have some of the highest levels of PCBs in their bodies.

It is the job of the EAB to assure that our environmental laws are administered consistently and fairly, and HRI in its appeal has told the EAB it believes that EPA Region 1 has failed to rigorously enforce the requirements of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) in its Final Permit Modification For Rest Of River in two major respects.

1) EPA allows GE to leave too many toxic PCBs in both Housatonic riverbank soils and river sediments when there are demonstrably effective and ecologically sound ways to first, remove them from the environment, and then second, successfully restore the environment that has been remediated. EPA's Rest of River Remedy unnecessarily allows these remaining PCBs at high levels to continue to put both human health and the health of wildlife and the environment at risk.

2) EPA arbitrarily and without significant or sufficient scientific analysis, unnecessarily neglects CERCLA Section 9621(b)'s preference for alternative remedial technologies. Not only has Region I failed to mandate a Conceptual Site Model for analyzing the potential for bioremediation or other potential alternative remedial technologies, or mandating pilot tests for such technologies, its Final Remedy relies in part on the unproven Monitored Natural Recovery remedy for several sections of the River. Choosing not to mandate the treatment and significant reduction of PCB-contaminated sediment and bank soil results in the unnecessary landfilling of great amounts of contaminated material. This decision therefore perpetuates unnecessary risks to human health and the environment.

The most comprehensive removal option studied over the past several years called for the removal of 2,902,000 cubic yards (cy) of contaminated sediment and soil, and 94,100 pounds of PCBs. EPA's final remedy will remove only 990,000 cubic yards and 46,970 pounds of PCBs. EPA has surrendered to the baseless claims of both GE and The Commonwealth of Massachusetts that a thorough cleanup will destroy the River. We know from the successful cleanup of the first two miles of the River that we can dredge then restore the most sensitive areas back to complete health.

Benno Friedman of Sheffield one of the founding members of HRI and a member of the Board of Directors commented: "We began advocating for a fishable, swimmable river. This incomplete cleanup will never give us the safe fishable, swimmable river we deserve. PCB-contaminated sediment and bank soils and signs advising us to toss fish back in the river, to watch where we walk and play with our children is not our idea of a clean healthy river. The fish, the ducks, the people of Berkshire County deserve a PCB-free Housatonic."

Tim Gray, HRI's Executive Director and the Housatonic Riverkeeper, declared: "In 2000, the then Region 1 Director Mindy Lubber promised the people of the Berkshires that EPA would conduct pilot tests of the most promising alternative remedial technologies. Sixteen years later we are still waiting. While we appreciate EPA's decision to use charcoal in the cleanup process we know other regions of EPA have more fully embraced alternative technologies. Now is the time to go into the river and try a range of new technologies that might destroy PCBs. We say treat PCBs, don't dump them."

Accompanying HRI's brief to the EAB are copies of a recent petition signed by more than 2,600 members of the community opposing the three local PCB dumps that GE wants to build in Berkshire County.

Copies of the HRI brief and accompanying attachments can be found at <http://www.nopcbdumps.com/>

For more information, contact:
Timothy Gray
Executive Director
Housatonic River Initiative, Inc.
P O Box 321
Lenoxdale, MA 01242-0321
(413) 243-3353
413-446-2520
housriverkeeper@gmail.com