

Historical use of PCBs from the 1930s through the 1970s:

Flame retardants

Hydraulic fluid

Plasticizers in paints

Floor tiles

Capacitors in electrical components

PCBs are mostly liquids that resemble honey-colored syrup. PCBs in mixtures can have an oily aroma and evaporate into the air. The compounds allow indirect flow of electrical current in capacitors without risk of fire, even when very hot. PCBs are persistent and most PCBs are not very water soluble. They tend to collect over time in the fatty tissues of animal life.

PCBs were manufactured in the United States by the Monsanto Company under the trade name "Aroclor." Aroclor 1242 was a formulation of PCBs widely used by General Electric to insulate capacitors manufactured at its plants in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls.

PCBs are heavier than water and tend to sink into the bottoms of rivers or streams. Over time, they can seep through bedrock into groundwater.

Hudson Falls and Fort Edward: Between 1946 and 1977, GE purchased more than 190 million pounds of PCBs for its capacitor plants in Hudson Falls and Fort Edward. There is an underground reservoir of PCBs at GE's Fort Edward plant that may still be spreading. The exact amount of PCBs that washed into the Hudson River from the two plants is unknown.

Halfmoon: The \$10 million Halfmoon water treatment plant, which was completed in 2003, was shut down in March 2010 after PCB levels of 2,000 parts per trillion were detected at the intake from the Hudson River. There was no dredging at the time. The New York state Department of Environmental Conservation sets safety limits for PCBs in groundwater at 90 parts per trillion. The town has since used water from a Troy reservoir.