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# AILING COUPLE SUES GE FOR 1B ON PCBS

BY JOE MAHONEY

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ALBANY - A husband and wife who say their ailments stem from living on PCB-contaminated property in West Glens Falls slapped General Electric with a \$1 billion lawsuit yesterday. "This was GE's responsibility," said their attorney, Marc Jay Bern. "They're the bad guys in this. They're the polluters.

" PCBs - polychlorinated biphenyls - were used at GE's Fort Edward plant as a fire retardant in transformers until they were banned by the federal government in 1975. Lab tests on animals indicated the chemical was a suspected carcinogen. Discarded GE capacitors were often dumped at a landfill near West Glens Falls, a community of several thousand people 45 miles north of Albany. Local residents took the devices apart to salvage copper, spilling poisonous PCBs on the ground, the lawsuit says. The suit was filed on behalf of Clara and Michael Mabb. The couple has suffered a variety of medical ailments - with Clara Mabb being stricken by three brain aneurysms in recent years, the lawyer said. Marc Behan, a GE spokesman, argued the company was not at fault. "GE did not dispose of PCBs or capacitors on these people's property, so any lawsuit against GE on this issue is misplaced.

" GE is already fending off pressure by the federal government to dredge the Hudson River to clean up its PCB pollution there. The Mabb's appeared at a news conference in Albany with their attorney and others from their neighborhood to announce the lawsuit. Clara Mabb was unable to speak. Tammy Thompson, 37, who grew up in West Glens Falls, said she still breaks out in painful cysts and boils. Thompson said she plans to sue GE. Dr. David Carpenter, a professor of environmental health at the State University at Albany, said at the news conference that "excessive exposure" to PCBs is likely to produce various health problems, though he said there is no way to pinpoint whether a particular illness was triggered by PCBs. But he added an investigation is needed to determine the extent of sickness in the contaminated neighborhood. "The health problems have really been given a backseat in the whole debate over PCBs," he said. Walter Hang, a public health researcher who has worked with the West Glens Falls citizens, said state environmental officials have failed to address PCB contamination adequately. A state Environmental Conservation Department spokeswoman called Hang's assertions ridiculous. The agency, she said, is still in the process of removing PCBs in the neighborhood. She acknowledged the agency has yet to bill GE for the cleanup.

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