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Plan to bury Aerovox waste on site opposed

By JOAO FERREIRA, Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — U.S. Rep. Barney Frank is voicing his opposition to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's plan to demolish and bury the Aerovox building on site.

In a letter to the EPA's regional administrator, Robert W. Varney, Rep. Frank, D-Mass., said he is concerned about the agency's preferred cleanup option that calls for capping demolition waste on the site in the basement of the Aerovox building.

The building is contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls.

"I remain unconvinced that the safeguarding of hazardous PCBs, even within a protective cover, will permanently protect the general public or harbor from this hazardous material, and [I] urge the EPA to remove as much waste as needed to bring this property to a level required for the determined reuse and public safety," Rep. Frank wrote in the letter dated Aug. 31. "Maintaining such a high concentration of PCBs in a residential area is only postponing a subsequent cleanup that will be more costly in the future."

Neighbors of the defunct plant at 740 Belleville Ave., the Coalition for Buzzards Bay and Acushnet officials also have expressed concern about the cleanup plan.

The EPA has recommended the cheapest of five cleanup options for Aerovox, which was one of two electrical parts manufacturers responsible for dumping PCBs into the harbor from 1940-77.

Under the plan, estimated to cost \$7.9 million, the building would be demolished and the material would be buried in the basement under a cap of at least 2 feet of clean soil and vegetation.

Under the other four plans, which range in cost from \$14.5 million to \$18 million, some or all of the waste would be buried elsewhere.

The demolition is recommended by the EPA to avoid a toxic chemical fire that would require neighborhood residents to evacuate. The building, which is contaminated with cancer-causing PCBs, mercury and asbestos, would release dangerous airborne toxins if it caught fire.

Residents and officials have doubted that the 2-foot cap of clean soil will protect human and environmental health if the building is demolished and buried on site.

Rep. Frank also recommends shipping the demolished material off site.

"I urge the EPA to move forward with a cleanup option that will remove all demolition waste containing PCBs at the abandoned Aerovox building," Rep. Frank wrote. "I also request the EPA take every action necessary to immediately protect the public as this process moves forward and the agency looks to secure funding to fully reimburse the city as they work to complete this cleanup."

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