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UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION I
JOHN F. KENNEDY FEDERAL BUILDING
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02203-0001

November 1, 1995

OFFICE OF THE
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

Honorable Barney Frank
Member, U.S. House of Representatives
558 Pleasant Street, Rm. 309
New Bedford, MA 02740

Dear Congressman Frank:

9/25/95 (DTD 1-2-97)

Thank you for your letter of October 3, 1995, concerning the next stage of cleanup for the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site. I am pleased to know that you support our current plan of using shoreline confined disposal facilities (or CDFs) to dispose of the PCB-contaminated sediment removed from the harbor. I also appreciate your viewpoint that the current plans for Phase 2 not be slowed down in any way given that half a pound per day of PCBs migrate to the lower harbor every day, and given the uncertain budget picture for Superfund cleanups. We also believe the decision-making for Phase 2 should move along as fast as possible.

Your letter, however, argues for an additional step involving treatment of the Phase 2 sediments once they are placed in the shoreline disposal facilities. We understand that everyone would prefer to physically destroy the PCB molecules, but in fact, treatment of this volume of sediments, (about half a million cubic yards or more), is prohibitively expensive - on the order of $220 to $440 million for treatment alone. For comparison, given current budget estimates, these amounts would represent EPA's total national budget for Superfund cleanups for one to two years.

We do have a special account strictly for the New Bedford Harbor site, but the current $56 million balance in it will not even cover the remaining clean up costs for the hot spots and phase 2 without treatment. Given that the CDF-based remedy without treatment reduces the amount of PCBs currently entering the harbor by over 98 percent, EPA does not believe that expenditures of the order required for treatment would be the best use of our limited public resources, nor does EPA believe that treatment achieves significant additional benefit to the harbor ecosystem or surrounding residents appropriate with such cost.

You note in your letter that since EPA and others did a good job of persuading people that PCBs are dangerous, the notion of leaving the dredged material indefinitely in CDFs is one that understandably makes people nervous. I would suggest that it is now EPA's job to educate and inform people that CDFs are a safe and protective method of isolating the PCBs from the environment. In fact, it is our sense that many in the local community, after listening to the information presented at the biweekly community Forum meetings, are beginning to understand this to be the case. In addition, the local businesses likely to be most impacted by the locations of the CDFs are exhibiting optimism about the potential future use of CDFs once they are completed.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that EPA is committed to doing everything possible given the resources at hand to treat the PCBs in the dredged sediments, and to provide for complete sediment treatment in the future should some form of cost-effective new process be developed. Our proposed remedy goes beyond simply dredging the contaminated sediment and disposing of it in CDFs.

The remedy also includes some limited treatment of PCBs through a sophisticated water treatment plant which will perform two functions. It will:

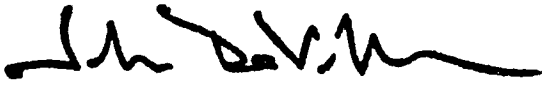
a) treat the PCBs in the water initially brought in with the dredged sediments and

b) treat the PCBs in the pore water squeezed out of the sediment as it settles over time.

The distinction between the two functions is important since studies show that the pore water "squeezed-out" of the sediments during the first few years after disposal will contain the highest amounts of PCBs. We propose to install systems that maximize the amount of pore water squeezed out of the sediment and collected for treatment. Regarding the potential for complete sediment treatment, should a promising new treatment process be developed in the near or distant future, the CDFs retain the potential to remine the dredged sediments for treatment with such a process.

Thank you again for your letter. I look forward to our continued progress at finding viable solutions for the next stage of harbor cleanup. If you have any further questions concerning this issue, please contact me or the site project manager, David Dickerson, at (617) 573-5735.

Sincerely,



John P. DeVillars
Regional Administrator