

Agency checked 8 alternative plans

Public comment on project starts this week

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NEW BEDFORD — Before choosing to dredge 118 acres of harbor bottom, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considered eight other alternatives.

Under the EPA's preferred plan, 118 acres of sludge — contaminated with heavy metals and from 50 to 4,000 parts per million of PCBs — would be removed from the harbor and then buried in the banks of the harbor. The \$33 million project would take about six years to complete, and two years to design engineering and other details before work would begin.

The agency is asking for public comment on the plan, which is the second phase of cleanup, as well as the other eight alternatives considered. The comment period will last 120 days from Jan. 30, the same date of a 7:30 p.m. informational meeting at the Days Inn.

The first phase of the cleanup calls for five acres of hot spots (areas containing more than 4,000 parts per million of PCBs) to be dredged and then incinerated at the foot of Sawyer Street. EPA officials said the agency has already reached a final decision on that stage; construction is expected to begin next month and burning is expected within a year.

However, opposition to incineration has gained momentum in the last few months and Hands Across the River was expected to hold a protest rally at 2 p.m. today at the Sawyer Street site.

The EPA said the two phases together will rid the harbor of about 90 percent of pollu-

tants that put New Bedford harbor on the national hazardous waste site 10 years ago.

The harbor is polluted with heavy metals, many considered toxic, and polychlorinated biphenyls, a chemical compound used by local manufacturing firms from the 1930s until it was banned in 1978. PCBs are considered a probable human carcinogen, and have caused cancer in laboratory animals.

Excepting its preferred alternative, the EPA looked at eight cleanup plans. Add about two years onto each project to design specific details.

Six of the plans considered would remove all sediments contaminated with 10 parts per million PCBs and above. Those plans follow:

■ **Minimal action.** This plan calls for no dredging or treatment of contaminated sludge, but would include "controls," such as warning signs, fencing, limited access to shore, a continued ban on shellfish, environmental monitoring, and public education.
Cost: \$7,478,000.

Length of project: 30 years.

■ **Capping.** About 277 acres of contaminated sediments would be sealed off with a cap, made of a "geotextile," synthetic material designed to keep the pollution below the cap. Sand would be layered over the cap, which may need anchoring in areas of fast moving waters.
Cost: \$105,913,000.

Length of project: 8 years

■ **Dredging, dewatering and disposal.** Nearly 300 acres of contaminated sludge would be dredged, and placed along the shoreline in pits that would be covered. To

reduce the amount of space needed for storage, the sludge could be squeezed of water first. The water would be treated to remove contaminants before being put back into the harbor.

Cost: Without dewatering, \$103,400,000.
With dewatering, \$164,050,000.

Length of project: Eight years.

■ **Dredging, dewatering, disposal and solidification.** Similar to above, but the sludge would first be treated with a cement-like mixture that would bind PCBs and heavy metals in the sediment, immobilizing them. Because the solidification would increase the amount of disposal material, more containment space on shore or near the shoreline would be needed.
Cost: \$307,832,000.

Length of project: 8 years.

■ **Dredging, solvent extraction and disposal.** The material would be dredged, drained and then treated with a solvent to extract PCBs, which would then be burned. The leftover sludge would be disposed of in containment pits after being checked to make sure toxic metals were not leaking from the mud.
Cost: \$529,584,000.

Length of project: 8 years.

■ **Dredging, incineration and disposal.** The material would be dredged, drained and then burned, the ash would then be buried.
Cost: \$626,936,000.

Length of project: 8 years.

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The EPA also looked at two alternative targeting only sludge contaminated with
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