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Monday, October 23, 1995
The Standard-Times, New Bedford, MA

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City vows to block PCB plan

Forum recalls harmful EPA role at Love Canal

By David Levesque
Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — Environmental organizer Lois Gibbs called New Bedford an example to the nation for its successful battle in blocking PCB burning, but she warned the city's fight is far from over.

The nationally-known environmental activist also compared the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposal to store treated mud dredged from the Acushnet River to the steps taken by the EPA at Love Canal, which she said devastated a city.

"What they are proposing to do is build a PCB-based Love Canal in New Bedford," Ms. Gibbs told more than 50 people who attended a talk at the Whaling Museum on Sunday.

She said the CDFs, or combined disposal facilities, the EPA is proposing be built on the city waterfront will not only be a permanent health threat to the city, but a financial burden.

The EPA plans to dredge contaminated sediment, drain off and treat the water, and then store the mud in CDFs, which the EPA says will safely contain the material.

This plan would greatly reduce the public risk of exposure to polychlorinated biphenyls and other contaminants.

Hands Across the River officials say they are against CDFs, essentially holding tanks, because the sediment would not be treated before being placed inside.

Ms. Gibbs said the situation is similar to that which permanently harmed the people and the environment at Love Canal in Niagara Falls, N.Y.

"If you go to Love Canal today, the problem is still there. The EPA did nothing," she said. "The exposure will be here forever if their plan goes through. By not treating this material and leaving it there, what do you think will happen to your community?"

In the 1970s, Ms. Gibbs organized a citizens group to fight the hazardous waste at Love Canal, forcing the federal government to acknowledge the problems in her housing development and to actually buy many of the homes there so families could leave the area.

Since then, she founded, and is the executive director of Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, which helps local groups fight to protect the environment. She recently authored *Dying from Dioxins: A Citizens Guide to Reclaiming Our Health and Rebuilding Our Democracy*.

She said the future of CDFs is simple: they eventually leak, causing health problems and forcing the community to maintain it into the future. "This isn't just a health risk it is a financial problem," she said, adding millions are spent on maintaining the CDF at Love Canal each year.

In 1992, Ms. Gibbs spoke in New Bedford during a forum sponsored by Hands Across the River. During that time the city was fighting the EPA's plans to allow incineration in the city.

It's an effort the city won, and an achievement it should be proud of, she said. "New Bedford has set a precedent in the country. People are in awe of what you

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Staff photo by Jack Iddon

Environmental activist Lois Gibbs spoke to more than 50 people at the Whaling Museum in New Bedford on Sunday.

■ PCBs

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accomplished," she told the crowd.

There were several faces in the audience who shared her admiration. "I'm impressed with what New Bedford has accomplished. It's something my town wasn't able to do for five years and now we have to live with the problem," said Stephen Ryan.

He was one of many residents of Holbrook who fought, mostly without the help of the town's elected officials, to stop the EPA from constructing an incinerator to burn toxins left in the soil from a pesticide manufacturer.

"Now New Bedford has a new bat-

tle, but they also have something to be proud of," he said.

He shook his head when thinking of what Holbrook has to show for its efforts. "I drive by the incinerator and see them pumping out emissions — that's what the EPA calls steam. And then I see the kids standing there on the street, waiting for the bus," he said. "I just wonder what it will do to those kids 20 years from now."

Prior to Ms. Gibbs' speech, Mayor Rosemary S. Tierney assured the audience that if she has anything to do about it, New Bedford will not have similar regrets.

"There is no way, no how the city will go with the EPA's request" for CDFs, she said. "We have children in that area, we have a park and we have plans for that area."

■ Educators

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The Japanese teachers said the average is five to six hours a day, including every other Saturday.

Student Orlando Pilon wanted to

ON THE AGEN

ACUSHNET

- School Improvement Council
6:30 tonight, Ford Middle School.
- Finance Committee
7 tonight, Town Hall.
- Historical Commission
7 tonight, Long Plain Museum.
- Park Commission
7 tonight, Town Hall.
- Appeals Board
7:15 tonight, Parting Ways Building.
- Council on Aging
9:30 a.m. Tuesday.
- Acushnet Elementary Council
7 p.m. Tuesday, Burt Memorial Library.

DARTMOUTH

- DeMello School
3:15 today, DeMello School.
- Council on Aging
4 today, Council on Aging.
- Assessors
6:30 tonight, Room 213, Town Hall.
- Selectmen
8:30 tonight, Room 304, Town Hall.
- Fire District 2 Prudential Committee
7 tonight, Russells Mills Road.
- Planning Board
7 tonight, Room 318, Town Hall.
- School Building Committee
7 tonight, Room 318, Town Hall.
- Fire District 1 Special District
8 tonight, Bridge Street.
- Special town meeting
7 p.m. Tuesday, high school.

FAIRHAVEN

- Contributory Retirement
10 a.m. today, Town Hall.
- Assessors
8:30 tonight, Town Hall.
- Health board
7 tonight, Town Hall.
- Selectmen
7 tonight, Town Hall.

■ Class Acts

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