RETURN TO 1998 ROD AR INDEX

13.3.36

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EPA will poll local panel on PCB disposal

By Natalie White
Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — The camps for and against confined disposal facilities are heading for a showdown next week.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plans to poll of the New Bedford Harbor Superfund Forum Dec. 7 to see where the group stands on the EPA's plan to bury half million cubic yards of contaminated sediments in combined disposal facilities, basically covered-over storage lagoons.

"We have to come to some sort of closure on these CDFs," Frank Ciavattieri of the EPA said last night while staffing an informational booth. About 50 people turned out for the forum, specifically scheduled for the public to view the booths and then ask questions.

The EPA wants to bury the sludge, polluted with polychlorinated biphenyls, in three CDFs: a 20-acre area at the foot of Sawyer Street, a 10-acre area behind the Aerovox plant and a 12-acre site off the old Herman Melville Shipyard.

The agency wants to propose the CDF plan soon but has been holding off because of opposition of some on the forum. The forum, made up of government and citizens' group representatives, was formed two years ago to help build community consensus regarding the harbor.

Hands Across the River Coalition presents the main opposition to the confined disposal facilities, saying the material should be treated before it's buried. Despite the disagreements, there seems to be some movement in both camps.

The coalition's president, Jim Simmons, said the group would agree to the Herman Melville Shipyard area CDF if the EPA agreed to test bioremediation — microbes that would eat contaminants — in the harbor.

"We want them to prove to us that it doesn't work, rather than just telling us," Mr. Simmons said.

Acushnet selectmen, initially against CDFs, wrote in a Nov. 28 letter to the forum that after reviewing the issue, they can now "tolerate" CDFs, if the EPA agrees to reopen its decision should a proven PCB-destruction technology surfaces.

Project Manager David Dickerson said the EPA is willing to review future technologies.

At yesterday's meeting, people asked questions ranging from the fate of Native American artifacts along the river to the ultimate ownership of any land created by the confined disposal facilities.

Officials said they are trying to determine what will be done with the artifacts, and ownership of the CDFs will initially be with the state.

Fall River firm gets PCB test permit

By Ric Oliveira
Standard-Times staff writer

FALL RIVER — The Board of Health has approved a permit application for Molten Metals to test their method of treating toxic PCBs. The tests could lead the company to work on the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site.

The company, which recycles industrial waste by submerging it in a molten metal bath that breaks down the chemicals, will have 180 days to test how well the process deals with PCBs. The permit allows the work to be conducted at its Fall River facility.

If the testing process is successful, Molten Metals could be eligible for the contract to build a PCB disposal facility in New Bedford.

"We may be one of three testers for the New Bedford site," said Jim Marshall, director of community development for Molten Metal.

Molten Metals has received permits from the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Protection to test its PCB process on 7,000 pounds of PCB-tainted material. Yesterday, the Board of Health accepted an amended permit to allow the PCB tests to be done in Fall River.

"If they are successful, they then would be able to look at the site in New Bedford," said Board of Health Director Tom Gecewicz.

He said that if Molten Metals' process works, the company could apply for the permit to treat the materials near the site in New Bedford.

Mr. Marshall said the EPA will award the contracts soon.

Priscilla Chapman, conservation officer for Fall River, said if Molten Metal is allowed to test PCBs from the New Bedford site, the material could not be transported into Fall River by Route 195.

"It would have to go down Route 140 and then onto Route 24 to the Airport Road exit."

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