

Opinion

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Our view

Satisfactory solutions elude planners of harbor cleanup

It's clear now that whatever method is used to clean New Bedford harbor of its PCBs, the solution is going to be far from perfect. The question now is whether it can ever be close enough to perfect to at least be acceptable.

The people of Ward 2 in the North End turned out in force Sunday to denounce the Environmental Protection Agency's plans. The idea, in Phase 2 of the project, is to divert the second 300 tons of PCBs from the original lagoon at the base of Coffin Avenue and instead place the material in another lagoon farther north, behind a row of factories.

This has left the people of Ward 2 with the strong sense that they are literally being dumped on by an EPA that does not care to look any farther afield for better solutions.

The EPA counters that the toxic material is there already, and that the containment in lagoons, while not the ultimate answer for the PCBs, will probably have to do until the science evolves and we can afford it.

They're both right, really. Moving the PCBs around in the same general area seems like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Hearing that the lagoons might leak a bit into the air and water for a few years before settling down does not warm the hearts of those who will have to live near them.

The EPA is also frustrated with the lack of attractive options, and understandably does not want to complicate its logistical and political problems by widening the search area for a storage lagoon. Such a search is not likely to bear fruit without a lot of political pressure coming from somewhere, and right now there are no volunteers to take the stuff. The mere act of transporting the material any meaningful distance poses risks and controversy. The EPA, by using these lagoons, is merely looking for the best option for containing the material to stop the pollution of Buzzards Bay without spending more money than anyone can dredge up.

The EPA is walking a tightrope here, and its balancing act is not made any easier by the fact that this situation fits the description, rightly or not, of "environmental racism" — the foisting of both pollution and undesirable remedies on areas that are relatively powerless economically and politically.

The New Bedford Forum, that group of citizens and officials who gather to look for answers to these vexing problems, will have that reality hanging over them like a cloud as its members sort through these issues. If this is the best the EPA can do? Is the best good enough? And if not, then what?

Privatization plans must face independent scrutiny

If you were going to hire someone to run your business, would you do so without first protecting the business's source of income, assets and ability to perform? Of course not. You would negotiate the best

JOSEPH DENUCCI

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