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Superfund Forum may have found a solution

PCBs will be kept away from homes

By Lori Rebello
Staff writer

The Environmental Protection Agency may very well have found an acceptable solution to the Coffin Avenue CDF (confined disposal facility) problem in New Bedford.

"I think we can celebrate today with a major victory," said Jim Simmons, president of Hands Across the River Coalition (HARC).

Recently, the EPA proposed a Phase 2 plan for the clean up of contaminated sediments in New Bedford Harbor. One of the proposed CDFs would have been located in a lagoon north of Coggeshall Street, near Coffin Avenue.

But when the agency showed the plan to local residents, they protested loudly.

That led the EPA to Plan B: several CDFs located along the New Bedford waterfront behind mills from Wood to Coggeshall Street.

"The (residents) didn't create the mess. Why not put it where it came from?" Simmons said.

Paul Koczera, ward councilor for the Coffin Avenue area, agreed the alternative is a feasible one.

"I think it's the best way of handling a very touchy problem," Koczera said. "The main thing is we're keeping it away from where people live."

He said the New Bedford Harbor Superfund Forum can't immediately solve a problem which took generations to create. But the sooner it takes action, the better.

"In a perfect world, we wouldn't have to deal with CDFs. We'd like

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ward councilor

to hold out for something better but we know we have to do something (now)," Koczera said.

Forum members are waiting for the fine details of the proposal, namely how big the CDFs will be, how they will be constructed, how much they will cost and how they will affect local wetlands and navigational dredging in the harbor.

"Anytime you make a decision on something as complicated as the PCB issue, it has to be acceptable from both a scientific and community standpoint," said John Haaland, Fairhaven selectman and forum member. "This may be the solution but I think the jury's still out."

Haaland said the forum will need to answer a number of questions before reaching a verdict.

"I have a hunch the EPA has already considered some of those factors," he said.

Simmons and Koczera also complimented EPA officials on their forward thinking and cooperation.

"The agency did listen to us, does agree with us and is working with us, not against us," Simmons said. "This is almost as sweet as the incinerator victory."

"I've got to give the EPA credit," Koczera agreed. "You hear so much about the government not listening to the will of the people, but I think this put them in a good light. We should take example from them."

While New Bedford will bear

the brunt of the harbor clean up, he added, neighboring towns will certainly benefit from a deeply dredged harbor. And agreement on how to do it.

Simmons pointed to HARC's vital role in the negotiation process.

"What's very important too is the work Hands Across the River has done. We've been working on this for a year and a half," he said. "We've been trying to find ways to enhance the river and not kill it."

Haaland said HARC has not always been united in its goals.

"One of the officers of HARC said (CDFs) ought to go on the Fairhaven side after they said they weren't safe. I do resent that, and I think the citizens of Fairhaven ought to resent that," he said.

Whatever the decisions may be, forum members and the government agencies will need to cooperate not only for the sake of the harbor and residents, but also for the rest of the world.

"Everybody's looking to New Bedford to see how to handle this issue," Koczera said, since this is one of the first projects of its kind in the country and since many other communities suffer from similar environmental problems.

"There are a lot of eyes on New Bedford right now," he said. "It's up to the forum to set a precedent."

In Grand Canyon, an environmental flood

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX - After 33 years of wreaking havoc on the Grand Canyon, the government wants to make amends. So it's staging a flood.

The four 8-foot-wide jet tubes at Glen Canyon Dam will be opened today, sending water rushing into the Colorado River and through the Grand Canyon at a rate fast enough to fill Chicago's Sears Tower in 17

minutes.

The purpose is to restore the Grand Canyon beaches and wildlife that have vanished because of micro-management of the flow of water through the dam.

Nothing will return the canyon to its pristine pre-dam days, and the effects of the weeklong flood may well be temporary. But when the experiment is over, scientists might get a better understanding of how much

water to release, and at what time of day, to help protect the environment.

The flood is a departure for the government, which for most of the past three decades has manipulated the flow to suit the needs of power companies. "This event is our first attempt to operate the dam for environmental purposes," said David Wegner, program manager for the US Bureau of Reclamation, the government's dam-managing agency.

Coalition targets Maine freshman

PORTLAND, Maine - US Rep. James Longley Jr. is under attack by a national coalition of labor and consumer groups that would like to see the Republican congressman lose in November. The coalition, known as the '96 Project, is waging a \$4 million campaign in 29 congressional districts across the country. The group is targeting districts of freshman Republicans it considers vulnerable in this November's elections. In Maine, demonstrations against Longley have been organized with the help of Vaughn Thompson, a 28-year-old Michigan native who moved to Maine last summer. Thompson has been working behind the scenes from the Teamsters Union office in South Portland. (AP)