

EPA wants to bury PCB sludge at four sites

By Natalie White
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NEW BEDFORD — As part of the cleanup of New Bedford harbor, federal environmental officials want to dredge about 170 acres of the harbor bottom and then bury the half-million cubic yards of PCB-contaminated muck in four spots along shore.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials said the project carries a \$116 million price tag and would remove more than 90 percent of PCBs from the New Bedford Harbor Superfund hazardous waste site, one of the nation's largest and most contaminated waste sites.

"This is a very difficult site, with no perfect solution," said David Dickerson, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency project manager for the New Bedford Superfund project.

He said the New Bedford Forum, a group of federal, state, local and citizens group representatives, has signed off on the proposal, as long as the EPA keeps an open mind about possible treatments.

The agency wants to put the contaminated sediments in "confined disposal facilities," or CDFs, then let the sediments settle for three years or so before capping them. The land created could have industrial or recreational use, officials said.

"I certainly don't expect that there will be no criticism. This plan doesn't include treatment of the sediments. But the CDFs are protective in their own right. They isolate the contaminants," said Mr. Dickerson. "It would just be woefully expensive to try and treat this amount, hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars."

However, he said the EPA promises to keep abreast of developing PCB destruction technologies.

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"If a miracle cure does show up, we still would be able to use it, especially during the window of opportunity before capping," said Mr. Dickerson.

The EPA has chosen four spots for disposal, all on the New Bedford side of the harbor. Two are by the Aerovox property along the Acushnet River; one is 8 acres and the other is 7 acres. A third CDF will be located just north of the Coggeshall Street Bridge and would be about 8 acres. The fourth would create 19 acres in North Terminal around the Herman Melville Shipyard.

Before the EPA began dredging a few years ago, the harbor contained more than 200 tons of polychlorinated biphenyls, considered a probable human carcinogen by the federal government. The chemical has caused cancer in laboratory animals, and has been linked to reproductive and liver problems.

The first phase of the cleanup is half done, and has cost about \$30 million.

Phase I called for about 10,000 cubic yards of sludge to be dredged from the most contaminated 10 acres of "hot spots," which has been done. This material contained about half of all the PCBs in the Superfund site. The original EPA plan, announced in 1990, also called for the tainted material to be burned, but local opposition to the plan

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forced EPA officials to change their minds. The agency is testing alternative treatments.

Meanwhile, the contaminated material is being held at the foot of Sawyer Street in a shoreline spot similar to those proposed for the Phase II cleanup.

The EPA will officially unveil its Phase II proposal at 6 p.m. Nov. 6 at an informational meeting at Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School on Ashley Boulevard.

A formal public hearing will be held at 6 p.m. Nov. 20, also at the high school. Comments from this meeting and written comments sub-

mitted before Dec. 9 will be addressed by the agency in a document called a responsiveness summary.

The New Bedford Harbor Superfund site includes 18,000 acres from Acushnet Harbor into Buzzards Bay. The third phase of the cleanup will deal with the outer harbor, which is much less contaminated than the inner harbor.