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# Local

- Agenda - Page C4
- Opinion - Page C8
- Obituaries - Page C10

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## Weld supports plan to bury PCB sludge

### Environmental official speaks at city hearing

By Natalie White  
Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — The state's top environmental official said the Weld administration stands behind a federal plan to vacuum the bottom of New Bedford Harbor and then bury a half-million cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment in four covered shoreline spots.

"It is not the perfect solution, but it is the best that technology has to offer us right now," Environmental Affairs Secretary Trudy Coxé said last night at a public hearing on the proposal put forth by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The \$116 million plan calls for the creation of more than 32 acres that will be filled in with the contaminated material, allowed to settle for three years or so, and then capped. The land could be used for recreation or industry, although the areas will not be lined and the contaminants will not be treated, officials said.

The EPA has said there is a minimal risk that contaminants will escape, but the plan will greatly reduce human health risks by removing the pollutants from the environment where they sit in the sediments and move into the food chain.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are chemicals

considered to be a probable human carcinogen by the federal government. The chemical has also been linked to reproductive problems and other disorders. New Bedford Harbor has one of the largest underwater PCB hazardous waste sites in the nation.

Ms. Coxé was one of two people who commented on the proposal, and one of only 20 who attended the hearing at the Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational-Technical High School. No one spoke in opposition to the plan, which would be the second phase of the Superfund clean up.

State Rep. William Strauss, D-Mattapoisett, spoke in favor of the plan. He praised the public input in the process that has been provided by the New Bedford Har-

bor Forum, a group of local, state and federal officials and citizens groups that was formed about two years ago.

The forum is one of the first of its kind in the nation, and was created after public opposition forced the EPA to back down on a plan to incinerate PCB-contaminated sludge.

"I laud not just the EPA, but all of the people in the New Bedford region," for their efforts, said Ms. Coxé. "It's important to keep that momentum going."

Months ago, there was some active opposition to the combined disposal facilities because the plan did not include treatment of the contaminants. The EPA has said (See PCBs, Page C2)

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## PCBs: Weld supports plan to bury sediment

**FROM PAGE C1**

no known technology could deal effectively with the contaminants in a cost-effective way. Opposition has quieted since the EPA agreed to an annual review of new technologies during the three years before capping and the agency said it would keep an open mind if a cost-effective, efficient technology were to emerge.

Ms. Coxe and Mr. Straus asked the EPA to consider combining the Superfund dredging with much-needed dredging of navigational lanes in the harbor to make it easier for large ships to come in and out of port.

Ms. Coxe said state officials will continue to work with federal officials to make sure that the vacuum dredging and the shoreline lagoons, called combined disposal facilities, will prevent the contaminants from escaping and protect the salt marshes and sea life as much as possible.

The EPA has chosen four spots for the combined disposal facilities. Two are by the Aerovox property, one just north of the Coggeshall Street Bridge and a fourth in North Terminal.

The EPA will consider comments until Dec. 9, or longer if a request to extend the deadline is approved.

AVX Corp., one of several companies sued for the pollution, has asked for the extension, EPA officials said. In a court-approved settlement where the company agreed to pay more than \$60 million toward the cleanup and restoration projects, the EPA and the company agreed that the government could reopen the case if the government had to

### EPA to accept input on cleanup

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will accept comments on its New Bedford Harbor Superfund cleanup plan until Dec. 9.

Send your comments to David Dickerson, Project Manager, U.S. EPA, Region I, HBO, JFK Federal Building, Boston, Mass., 02203.

More detailed information about the plan, the project's history and related studies, go to the Wilks Branch Library, 1911 Acushnet Ave., New Bedford, or contact the EPA Records Center at (617) 573-5729.

After the public comment period closes, the EPA will review them before making a final decision on the plan.

spend more than \$130 million cleaning up the pollution.

The EPA has already spent more than \$30 million on the first phase of the cleanup, which removed 5 acres of the most severely contaminated sediments from the Acushnet River. Those sediments are being stored at the foot of Sawyer Street while the EPA tests PCB-destroying technologies.

EPA officials said they are a long way from considering reopening the case, and that not all of the money spent or to be spent would be directly related to the cleanup.