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Environmental Protection Agency
New England Region

Office of External Programs
JFK Federal Building
Boston, MA 02203

Connecticut Maine Massachusetts New Hampshire Rhode Island Vermont

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Contact: Alice Kaufman, EPA Community Affairs, 617-565-4592
David Dickerson, EPA Project Manager, 617-573-5735

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EPA ISSUES CLEANUP DECISION FOR UPPER AND LOWER NEW BEDFORD HARBOR

BOSTON - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today issued a 10 year, $120 million cleanup plan for the Acushnet River and New Bedford Harbor in Massachusetts. The cleanup plan calls for the dredging and shoreline containment of one half million cubic yards of contaminated sediment from 170 acres of New Bedford Harbor, making it one of the largest cleanup operations in the nation. The plan was developed in close cooperation with the New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site Community Forum and other state and federal agencies during a long consensus-building process. The sediment will be disposed of in what are known as confined disposal facilities (CDFs) to be constructed in four shoreline locations.

"What was once a pitched battle is now an example of consensus building at its best," said John P. DeVillars, EPA's New England administrator. "We're achieving a super environmental result with the strong support of neighborhood and community leaders."

"Too often our attention focuses on conflict between citizen groups and government agencies," said Congressman Barney Frank. "Today's announcement is an important example of how cooperative efforts between the two can be productive. I am very proud of the constructive work that has been done by the citizens of the greater New Bedford area to try to improve the condition of the river and harbor."

"We at Hands Across the River are pleased that ROD 2 of the New Bedford Harbor cleanup was signed recently," said Jim Simmons, president of Hands Across the River Coalition. "This signals the beginning of the end of our PCB contaminated river and harbor, and allows for coordination with

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the effort to dredge our navigational channels. We look forward to working together with EPA in an open-minded fashion during the design of the CDFs."

"After all these years, it's gratifying to finally have a solution in place for the cleanup of New Bedford Harbor," said Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner David B. Struhs. "This has been an incredibly complex process, and all the parties involved in reaching this consensus are to be congratulated for their perseverence and dedication to achieving the best possible outcome for the community and the environment. We especially want to thank EPA for including the linkage between harbor cleanup and navigational dredging."

"This represents an important milestone in the New Bedford harbor cleanup," said Jane Wells, deputy director of the Massachusetts Office of Dispute Resolution and facilitator of the New Bedford Harbor Community Forum. "It is a testament to the hard work and commitment of the forum members representing diverse community groups that their concerns and ideas were included in this cleanup plan."

The ROD lays out a detailed cleanup plan for areas of varying concentrations of PCB-contamination. The key elements of the cleanup are:

- Approximately 450,000 cubic yards of sediment contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) will be removed. In the upper harbor north of Coggeshall Street, sediments above 10 parts per million (ppm) PCBs will be removed, while in the lower harbor and in saltmarshes, sediments above 50 ppm will be removed.

- In certain popular beach combing shoreline areas, sediments between the high and low tide levels will be removed if above 25 ppm PCBs. In areas where homes directly abut the harbor and where contact with sediment is expected, sediments between the high and low tide levels will be removed if above 1 ppm PCBs.

- Four shoreline CDFs will be constructed on 44 acres to contain and isolate the dredged sediments. Three of these facilities will be in the upper harbor, and one will be in the lower harbor. Archaeological surveys will be performed prior to construction of the CDFs and before dredging is started.

- Once the dredged sediments are placed in the CDFs, the large volumes of water that are brought in by the dredging process will be decanted and treated before being discharged back to the Harbor.

- A cap will be constructed at each CDF, and where possible, cleaner sediment from the harbor's navigational channels will be used as part of the interim caps. The CDFs will be available for beneficial reuse as shoreline open space, parks or, in the case of the lower harbor CDF, a commercial marine facility.

- The capped CDFs will be monitored and maintained over the long term to ensure their integrity.

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The New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site encompasses all of New Bedford Harbor and parts of nearby Buzzards Bay. The widespread PCB contamination of the site is the result of past waste disposal practices at two electrical component manufacturing plants. PCB wastes were discharged directly into the harbor as well as indirectly via the city's sewerage system. In 1977, high levels of PCBs detected in local seafood led Massachusetts to enact a fishing ban throughout the 18,000 acre site. In 1983, the site was added to EPA's National Priorities (Superfund) List making it eligible for federal cleanup funds.

The decision for the first or "hot spot" cleanup phase was made in 1990. Five acres of the most highly contaminated sediment were dredged in 1994 and 1995. Hot spot sediments are currently in interim storage in a separate CDF until an alternative to EPA's original plan for on-site incineration of these sediments is selected (EPA suspended this incineration after vehement local opposition to it developed in 1993).

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