

## Harbor blasting to begin mid-September for South Terminal

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NEW BEDFORD — With much of the dredging efforts complete, South Terminal workers are preparing for the next stage of construction: blasting harbor bedrock to make way for the large ships expected to be using the terminal.

In order to accommodate large vessels carrying multi-ton components during both high and low tides, the harbor's shipping channel will have to reach a depth of 32 feet at the South Terminal bulkhead. (Currently, some areas of the to-be-blasted bedrock are only 15 to 25 feet below the water level at low tide.)

To achieve the appropriate depth, terminal workers will begin what state officials describe as "controlled underwater blasting" in mid-September.

For each blast, workers will drill holes in the bedrock, which they will then stuff with explosives known as Blastex. The holes will be "corked" so that when the blast is set off, the vibrations will not result in large waves.

The blasting will occur once or twice per day between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. for four to six weeks, according to Bill White of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center.

He said the impacts of the blasts could be felt up to 1,500 feet away from the site, but will feel like "a bus passing by your house."

"We don't anticipate having any kind of above-water noise," he said.

Though the blasting will involve explosives, White shied away from calling them "explosions" because "explosion implies that it is spontaneous, not planned or controlled."

Indeed, White said MassCEC has been coordinating the explosions with 13 local, state and federal agencies, including the Department of Marine Fisheries, which will monitor the blasts' effect on harbor sea life.

Port Director Jeffrey Stieb said he cannot recall another time when there has been blasting in the harbor. He said the Harbor Development Commission has been coordinating with South Terminal developer Cashman-Weeks NB to make sure the blasting doesn't adversely affect boat traffic.

Cashman-Weeks has hired an independent contractor, Contract Drilling and Blasting, to carry out the work.

Blasts are expected to occur earlier in the morning, around 9 a.m., Stieb said. There will be a notice sent to boats in the harbor 15 minutes before each blast, during which time boats will be asked to avoid the area between Palmers Island and the western shore of the harbor. That moratorium will remain in effect for up to 15 minutes after each blast.

"The purpose of this isn't because we are worried that people on the vessels will be hurt," Stieb said. "We just want to make sure no one is being stupid and going into the blast area."

Beyond the small vibrations on land, White said he did not expect the blasts to be noticeable.

"We don't expect any waves," he said. "There may be some small bubbles or splash directly over the area of impact, but that's it," he said.

He said the explosions are not expected to affect the Confined Aquatic Disposal (CAD) Cells north of Popes Island because "this is not near them."

White also said any contaminated material at the South Terminal site will have been removed before blasting begins. He added that the plans have already been approved by the EPA.

Korrin Petersen of the Buzzards Bay Coalition said her organization has not yet looked into what effects blasting could have on the CAD cells. But, she noted that the sediment in the current CAD cells has "relatively low levels of contamination."

"We would be more concerned once they start filling the EPA's CAD cell with highly contaminated material," she said.

MassCEC and the HDC have already begun reaching out to South Terminal neighbors to warn them about the blasting, White and Stieb said.

White also noted that there will be two public meetings about the South Terminal project before the blasting occurs where residents can voice their concerns. The first of those meetings will be Tuesday at 6 p.m. in the New Bedford Library.