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Karl Dlugosinski
21 Winsor Street
Fairhaven, MA 02719

Dear Mr. Dlugosinski:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been actively pursuing possible remedies for the PCB contamination in the Acushnet River Estuary and New Bedford Harbor since the fall of 1982. In August of 1984, the Agency released a Feasibility Study which presented five options for cleaning up the Acushnet River Estuary north of the Coggeshall Street bridge, an area referred to as the "hot spot." During the public comment period on the "hot spot" Feasibility Study, the Agency received extensive comments addressing technical deficiencies and unknowns relating to the options presented. Specifically, the potential impacts of dredging and the issue of whether or not the EPA can dredge and remove contaminants without creating a worse environmental problem had not been fully addressed. Potential releases of PCBs due to resuspension and accelerated transport of contaminated sediments were serious concerns raised by the public comments, other Federal and State Agency comments, and, in particular, the Corps of Engineers' comments, experts in the field of dredging and disposal.

The EPA is committed to selecting an environmentally sound remedy which will protect human health and welfare. However, a decision will not be made to implement a clean up action until the Agency can begin such clean up measures with the confidence that their actions will be a permanent remedy and will also provide full protection of citizens in the area.

The Agency has examined closely the potential threats to human health in this interim period, before the implementation of a clean up action. At present, the primary pathway of public exposure to PCBs is through the food chain -- consumption of fish from the Acushnet River and New Bedford Harbor. Therefore, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has closed these areas to fishing. Public education, sign posting, and limited fencing have been initiated by the EPA to prevent fish consumption until such a time as the Department of Public Health feels that it is safe to re-open fishing in this area.

In regards to the oily film found on automobiles, etc., after the hurricane, it is difficult to identify the source and chemical

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UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

PCBs; however, these PCBs and PCB oils bind closely to the sediment due to the chemical makeup of this contaminant. Even under storm conditions, it is unlikely that the PCB-contaminated oils would be airborne. The Agency is primarily concerned with the release of PCBs from the sediment into the water column creating an availability for the biota. We recently conducted an air sampling program to evaluate the presence of PCBs on particulate matter in the vicinity of the estuary, but do not have any results.

In response to your concern about continued dumping of waste from mills in the area, the Agency is responsible for regulating disposal into the river under the Clean Water Act. Using the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Program, EPA issues permits to industrial facilities with significant discharges to regulate the levels of contaminants and waste in the discharges. At this time, the Agency is not aware of any permit violators. If you have concerns and/or information about specific discharge points, please contact Sue Grady at (617)223-3924 in the NPDES program. Phil Ripa at the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Quality and Engineering at (617)947-1231 extension 680 may be able to provide additional information.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Jackie Prince of my staff at (617)223-1951.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Deland
Regional Administrator

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