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EPA Environmental News

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EPA PROPOSES PLAN TO ADDRESS CONTAMINATION IN UPPER BUZZARDS BAY

BOSTON -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today announced the release of a proposal to address contaminated areas in the Upper Buzzards Bay portion of the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site.

EPA's preferred alternative and other alternatives evaluated to address contamination in the Upper Buzzards Bay portion of the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site will be presented at a May 13, 1992, public meeting, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Days Inn on Hathaway Road in New Bedford. A question and answer session will follow approximately one hour of presentations. Copies of the plan will be available at the meeting.

This proposal, which is referred to as the Addendum Proposed Plan, calls for dredging sediments from two areas near the Hurricane Barrier and disposing the dredged sediment in a Confined Disposal Facility (CDF) on shore, and also capping with clean fill an area at the outfall of the municipal waste water treatment plant (WWTP). This proposal is in response to a request from the Trustees and includes information supplied by them. The Trustees include the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association, Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management, and the Department of Interior.

"These proposed actions seek to mitigate public health and environmental risks posed by contamination in the Upper Buzzards Bay portion of the New Bedford Harbor Superfund site," stated EPA Regional Administrator Julie Belaga. "This proposal for the Upper Bay, our proposal for the estuary and lower harbor, and the cleanup of highly contaminated sediments in the Hot Spot will provide the safe, thorough and expeditious action that is necessary to protect public health and eventually restore the valuable natural resource that New Bedford Harbor provides to southeastern Massachusetts."

Under the Addendum Proposed Plan, EPA proposes dredging forty-two additional acres of contaminated sediment in two areas next to

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the Hurricane Barrier. Dredging of some sediments in these two areas was previously proposed by EPA as part of its suggested course of action for the estuary and lower harbor. The expanded dredging described in the Addendum Proposed Plan will further protect aquatic life in these nearshore areas inhabited by young fish and lobster. Dredged sediment would be transported by a scow, or special boat, to the northern end of the lower harbor. From the lower harbor these sediments would be transported by floating pipeline to a CDF on the shore of the estuary. Construction of this CDF was previously proposed as part of the remediation of the estuary and lower harbor. The sides of the CDF would be made two feet higher in order to accommodate the additional sediment.

This proposed remedy also involves capping a 17-acre area at the WWTP outfall with approximately six feet of clean material dispersed over the entire area. Clean fill would be transported from upland areas to the waterfront and then conveyed by boat to the outfall area. The large amount of material is necessary to ensure that the minimum two feet of clean material required to block chemical transport and mixing by burrowing organisms will be placed over the entire area. The clean cap will eliminate transfer and accumulation of contaminants from the sediments into the animals living in the sediments. These animals in turn serve as a food for fish that are known to congregate and feed at the outfall. The expanded cleanup will reduce contamination of the valuable fishery resource found in Buzzards Bay.

EPA will conduct a 30-day public comment period beginning on May 14, 1992, on the Addendum Proposed Plan. EPA also extended the public comment period on its Proposed Plan for the estuary and lower harbor to coincide with the comment period for the Addendum Proposed Plan. During this period, EPA will accept both oral and written comments on the Addendum Proposed Plan and other alternatives evaluated in the Supplemental Feasibility Study (SFS), and on the Proposed Plan for the estuary and lower harbor issued in January of this year. EPA will hold a public hearing on June 10, 1992, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Days Inn on Hathaway Road to accept oral comments on the Addendum Proposed Plan and other alternatives evaluated in the SFS. Written comments on the Addendum Proposed Plan and on the January 1992, Proposed Plan should be mailed (postmarked no later than June 12, 1992) to:

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The New Bedford Harbor Superfund site encompasses approximately 1,000 acres in New Bedford Harbor and 17,000 acres in Buzzards Bay. The primary contaminants at the site are the result of past disposal of PCB contaminated process wastes from industries along the Acushnet River. In 1977, testing of edible fish taken from upper Buzzards Bay revealed PCB levels in excess of U.S. Food and Drug Administration guidelines. As a result, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has restricted fishing in New Bedford Harbor and parts of Buzzards Bay. In 1982, EPA added the site to the National Priorities List of hazardous waste sites eligible for federal action under the Superfund program. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection has designated New Bedford Harbor as its priority Superfund site.

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