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UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION I
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New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site

EPA Fine Tunes the Harbor Cleanup Plan

Since issuing its September 1998 New Bedford Harbor cleanup plan, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), through additional investigations, has learned new information about the extent of contamination and how best to clean it up. This information has lead to five modifications to the cleanup plan.

What are the Modifications?

One: Using Mechanical Dewatering
Two: Revising the Wall Design of Confined Disposal Facility (CDF) 'D'
Three: Adding a Rail Spur
Four: Discovering More Intertidal Areas Above Cleanup Levels
Five: Using the Pilot Study CDF as a Temporary TSCA Facility

What is Mechanical Dewatering?

Excess amounts of water from dredged sediment are removed by mechanical equipment.

Why use Mechanical Dewatering in Cleaning Up the Harbor?

Mechanical dewatering will greatly reduce the volume of sediment that needs to be disposed. The harbor cleanup plan calls for four confined disposal facilities (CDFs) to permanently house the contaminated sediments. By using mechanical dewatering, it may be possible to store the sediments in only two CDFs (as long as the estimated amount of contaminated sediment is correct): CDF C at the bottom of Sawyer Street and a smaller than originally thought CDF D in the North Terminal area.

Why was the Wall Design Changed for CDF D?

Sediment borings showed weak and silty sediments in the harbor's north terminal area where CDF D will be built. Such sediment, combined with the deep water, do not allow for a structurally-sound single sheet pile wall, the original CDF D design.

What Type of Wall will be Built for CDF D?

A rock-filled dike design was chosen for CDF D after studying a number of wall and dike designs. The existing soft sediment will be dredged and replaced with structural fill before the dike is constructed.

Why is a Rail Spur Needed for the Harbor Cleanup?

Extending a rail spur from the New Bedford rail depot across the street to the CDF D area will help in removing the area's soft sediment and delivering the significant amount of rock and fill needed for CDF D. Transporting these materials by rail also will avoid increasing truck traffic through the neighborhood. The rail spur extension benefits the area's redevelopment, as well.

How were Additional Contaminated Intertidal Areas Located?

Since 1999 more sediment sampling has been taken to get a better understanding of contamination levels in the upper harbor's intertidal areas.

Intertidal dredging and replanting activities just south of Main Street in Acushnet

What Actions were Taken at these Locations and Why?

Based on contamination levels, these areas were either fenced with warning signs or dredged, back-filled with clean soil, and replanted in the spring of 2001. Fenced areas will be cleaned up during the larger dredging activity scheduled to begin in 2003. EPA took these actions to make sure people were not in danger of having direct contact with PCB-contaminated sediment since contamination above cleanup levels was found along shoreline residential or parkland properties.

What and Where is the Pilot Study Confined Disposal Facility?

EPA has a cleanup facility at the base of Sawyer Street. In addition to office trailers, a water treatment plant, and three water holding cells, the facility includes a six-acre confined disposal facility along the shoreline just north of Sawyer Street. This CDF was built as part of the 1988-89 dredging and disposal study and was partially filled with contaminated sediment.

What is a Temporary TSCA Facility and Why is the Pilot Study CDF going to be used as One?

A temporary TSCA (Toxic Substances Control Act) facility must meet various safety standards. Monitoring of the groundwater, air, and surface soils is being performed to make sure the Pilot Study CDF meets those standards. The Pilot Study CDF now stores additional contaminated sediment from the dredging of the upper harbor intertidal area and the relocation of a combined sewer overflow. By being able to use the space in the Pilot Study CDF, the cleanup of the harbor has been able to move forward faster and with less cost.

Will the Pilot Study CDF ever be used as a Permanent Disposal Facility?

The decision whether to use this facility for permanent storage will be made in the future with public input.

Who do I Contact for More Information?

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The New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site is an 18,000 acre urban estuary reaching from the upper Acushnet River into Buzzards Bay. Its sediments are highly contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and heavy metals. PCBs are manmade, odorless, and colorless chemicals that were used in New Bedford in the manufacturing of electrical transformers and capacitors. The health effects from PCBs may include liver and immune system damage; neurological, developmental, and reproductive effects; and cancer. Due to the health risks from eating fish, shellfish, and lobster from certain areas of New Bedford Harbor and the Acushnet River Estuary, the MA Department of Public Health has restricted fishing and lobstering in these areas since 1979.

The 1998 harbor cleanup plan calls for the dredging of approximately 470,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment and their permanent storage in four shoreline confined disposal facilities (CDFs). Dredging is scheduled to begin in 2003.