

# SUPERFUND

## Fact Sheet

PM NORTHWEST SITE  
FIDALGO ISLAND, WASHINGTON



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

July 2001

### **Petroleum Waste Cleanup to Begin**

This month on Fidalgo Island, work will begin to dig up petroleum refinery waste sludges and contaminated soil around the four former waste disposal areas at the PM Northwest Site. The site is on the Swinomish Indian Reservation. Shell Oil Company and Texaco, Inc., two of the potentially responsible parties (PRPs) for the site, have agreed to do this removal under Tribal and EPA oversight. EPA expects that the first phase of this work will be finished in September 2001, and that sampling results will be available shortly thereafter in the fall of 2001.

### **What is the Planned Cleanup Process?**

In October 2000, EPA, Shell and Texaco signed an Administrative Order on Consent (AOC). Under this order, Shell and Texaco agreed to clean up the site, and sent a Work Plan to EPA and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community ("the Tribe") for review. The Work Plan was approved at the end of June 2001.

The cleanup is designed and intended to protect both human health and the environment. First, the PRPs will dig up waste sludge and contaminated soil from the four former waste disposal areas, and take this material to a permitted, off-site disposal facility. This will remove the source of contamination. Studies will be performed to make sure that earthworms, a sensitive test species, can thrive in the residual soil left behind.

After the source area is removed, the PRPs will do additional work to determine whether contamination has migrated beyond the disposal areas to other areas of the site. If so, the PRPs will evaluate whether additional cleanup work needs to be done. EPA will send out another fact sheet to inform you about cleanup progress and the next steps.

### **Work Hours and Traffic Information**

EPA, the Tribe, and the PRPs have worked together to ensure that the work will be conducted in a safe manner and that road traffic will be minimized as much as possible. Access to the site is restricted by a locked gate at the property access road where it intersects with Padilla Heights Road. During work hours, a guard will be present at the gate to control site access and direct traffic. Signs will be placed warning horseback riders about on-site truck traffic. Site work is expected to occur Monday through Friday, from early morning to late afternoon.

### **What is the Tribe's Role?**

The Tribe is a federally recognized tribe with all associated treaty rights and responsibilities. As a natural resource trustee (with sovereign rights to protect, conserve, and restore the total environment impacted by the site), the Tribe has been greatly involved in the work leading up to this cleanup. For example, the Tribe has worked diligently with EPA and other involved parties to

develop the AOC and Work Plan. The Tribe will provide daily oversight of site field work, working closely with their retained tribal consultant and EPA to ensure that the Work Plan is followed.

The AOC includes provisions concerning the rights, responsibilities, and role of the Tribe in the cleanup. It identifies points when EPA will consult with the Tribe before sending comments or making decisions. The AOC provides for Shell and Texaco to reimburse the Tribe's past costs and future oversight costs. EPA has also negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Tribe that further describes the working relationship, roles, and responsibilities between EPA and the Tribe. The MOA can be found at EPA's PM Northwest Site web page at <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth>. Click on "Index," then click on "P."

## **Site Background**

The PM Northwest site is private property located within the Swinomish Indian Reservation. It covers seven acres in a heavily wooded, remote area on Fidalgo Island near La Conner, Washington. EPA estimates that less than twenty people live within one-half mile of the site. Four former disposal areas with petroleum refinery wastes exist on site, and drinking water wells and sensitive wetlands are within one-half mile. In 1957, Plant Maintenance, Inc., purchased the property. PM Northwest, Inc., acquired title to the property in 1961, after the dissolution of Plant Maintenance, Inc.

Up until 1970, PM Northwest contracted with Texaco and Shell oil companies to dispose of petroleum refinery wastes, including spent catalysts, effluent plant sludges, spent caustics, slop oil emulsion solids, separator sludge, and other materials. In response to Superfund information requests, Shell and Texaco provided information that waste materials generated by their petroleum refineries were transported to and disposed of at the site. The wastes were placed in the four disposal pits and several trenches (also referred to as dis-

posal areas). By 1970, after the disposal activities had stopped, PM Northwest covered the disposal areas with soils from the site. Since then, the property has naturally revegetated as woodlands.

## **Findings of EPA's Site Assessment**

In 1998 and 1999, EPA conducted a study called an "Integrated Site Assessment" (ISA) at the site to assess risks and determine the need for a cleanup. A draft study was issued when the work was completed. EPA installed monitoring wells near the disposal areas, and sampled soil, groundwater, surface water, and sediment from the nearby wetlands and bluff. Soil, sludge, and drum contents from the disposal areas were also tested.

Test results from monitoring wells reveal that organic and inorganic contaminants may be migrating from the sludge materials into the surrounding soils, and into shallow groundwater. Test results from area drinking water wells do not indicate that the deeper groundwater used for drinking water is contaminated. However, more investigation of the groundwater will be performed. EPA will keep the community informed of future test results.

The study also found that contaminated shallow groundwater may have flowed through seeps and contaminated wetlands water and sediments on Tribal property near the former disposal areas. Some of these contaminants are above regulatory screening levels, which means that additional information needs to be gathered before EPA can decide if more cleanup work needs to be done after this removal.

## **Why We Are Doing the Cleanup: How Could the Environment and People be Affected?**

Due to the remote location of the site, contaminants there apparently pose more potential risks to animals, fish, and the environment than they pose to people. EPA will continue to keep the community informed of all risks as we receive sampling results.

*Sampling revealed:*

- the disposal areas and contaminated soil contain high levels of several organic and inorganic hazardous substances, mainly metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), within the first five to six feet of the soil surface and upon the soil surface. These contaminants may be migrating away from the source area, posing risks to animals and plants.
- plants exposed to metals-contaminated soil do not thrive, and it is more difficult for them to photosynthesize. Many metals (especially lead) can stay in forest soils for a long time, and can accumulate in plants.
- at relatively low concentrations, heavy metals and PAHs can be toxic to soil microorganisms that support the base of the soil ecosystem.
- wetlands, a sensitive ecosystem, lie within one mile of the disposal areas. Contaminants were found in wetland surface water, sediments, and some seeps, indicating that contaminants from the disposal areas may have moved into the wetlands. This needs to be investigated further to determine if there is a health or environmental problem.
- fifty-five-gallon drums, five-gallon containers, and other small containers were found buried in the disposal areas. PAHs, benzene and carbon tetrachloride were found in disposal pond drums, and some drums had leaked. Contaminants can migrate from the drums, posing risks to plants and animals. Many of these containers have already been removed.

*The contamination may also pose a risk to human health*

- the disposal area has been used for hunting and off-road recreation (such as horseback riding), which can expose people to

contaminants if they inhale airborne particles, drink surface waters, or accidentally swallow contaminated soil or dust.

### About Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)

A few PAHs have been found to cause cancer, cell mutations, and harm fetuses. To avoid PAHs exposure, harmful levels of these PAH contaminants will be removed from the site. For more information about PAHs, please see the fact sheet on the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's website: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts69.html>. A copy of this document will also be included in the site's administrative record.

### For more information

**If you have any questions, please contact one of the following people:**

#### **EPA**

**Lynda Priddy**, On-Scene Coordinator  
(206) 553-1987  
E-Mail: priddy.lynda@epa.gov

**Debra Packard**, Community Involvement Coordinator  
(206) 553-0247  
E-Mail: packard.debra@epa.gov

*Toll free at 1-800-424-4372*

**Swinomish Indian Tribal Community**  
**Jeff Hegedus**, Environmental Engineer  
(360) 466-7304  
E-Mail: jhegedus@swinomish.nsn.us

The Administrative Record, which contains documents used in making cleanup decisions for this site, will be available for review at:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Seventh Floor Records Center  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98101  
**(206) 553-4494**

and

Swinomish Indian Tribal Community  
Office of Planning and Community Development  
ATTN: **Summer Charles**  
11430 Moorage Way  
P.O. Box 817  
LaConner, WA 98257  
**(360) 466-7280**

### **Online Information**

See the EPA Region 10 web page at: <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth>  
*Information on the PM NW Site can be found by clicking on "Index," then clicking on "P."*

If you would like to receive future fact sheets about EPA's activities at this site, please contact Debra Packard at (206) 553-0247.

1. Fold this page in half so that your information is on the inside.
2. Tape or staple closed.
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*PM Northwest Site  
La Conner, Washington*

Do you want to be on the Mailing List?

We are using a carrier route mailing list for this first fact sheet. If you would like to be included on the permanent mailing list to receive future information about the PM NW site, please fill out this form and return it to EPA.

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