DMMP CLARIFICATION PAPER

CLARIFICATION ON THE DMMP POLICY ON BLANK CORRECTION FOR METHOD BLANK CONTAMINATED CHEMICAL SAMPLES

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INTRODUCTION

The Dredged Material Management Program (DMMP) requires the analysis of one method blank per batch of samples undergoing chemical analyses as part of the general quality assurance control procedures during the routine analysis of sediment samples. As stated in the Puget Sound Estuary Program (PSEP) protocols "Method blanks are analyzed to assess possible laboratory contamination of samples associated with all stages of preparation and analysis of sample extracts." When reporting results to the DMMP agencies "Laboratories should report original sample data without blank correction and should report data for all method blanks such that the contribution to associated samples can be determined."

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

This clarification addresses how the DMMP agencies will use method blank data during a project evaluation. It was necessitated by a blank contamination issue, that surfaced recently during sediment characterization for a dredging project. In the recent example, the analyte TBT exhibited blank contamination within a subset of the samples. The question arose as to whether or not the data should be blank corrected for regulatory decision-making. In this example, blank corrected samples would result in several samples being quantitated below the screening level (SL), whereas without blank correction they would exceed the SL.

PROPOSED CLARIFICATION

The DMMP agencies policy is and will continue to be that blank correction of samples is not authorized when a method blank sample within a sample batch exhibits apparent blank contamination. The purpose of the method blank as noted above is to verify the laboratory procedures as a quality assurance/quality control measurement. If serious blank contamination is observed, the DMMP agencies may require a retest of samples within the affected batch, or they may choose to use the data for regulatory decision-making without blank correcting.