



# Harbor Cleanup News

New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site - February 2003

## Early Cleanup Work Continues

### U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Removing Contaminated Sediment From Acushnet River: 6.5 Acres Nearly Clean

The Acushnet River just south of Main Street to just south of the Wood / Slocum Street Bridge is being redirected to allow the excavation of around 12,000 cubic yards of contaminated PCB sediment from the river bed. The contaminated sediment is being trucked to EPA's facility at the foot of New Bedford's Sawyer Street where it is being processed and submerged under water in holding cells. The excavation will be done by March 2003 in time for the spring fish run. Shoreline restoration and replanting of native trees and wetland grasses and shrubs will happen in the spring and summer. The contaminated sediment will stay in the holding cells until the facilities needed for the full-scale harbor dredging are built in 2004; the sediment will then be processed and disposed of at an off-site licensed landfill.

### Wood / Slocum Street Area PCB Contamination Levels

PCB levels are highly variable throughout the harbor Superfund site, including this northern-most area. Levels as high as 30,000 to 40,000 parts per million have been detected in wetland and mudflat areas north of Wood / Slocum Street. These levels are



Acushnet River North of Wood / Slocum Street



Removing Contaminated Sediment North of Wood / Slocum Street



Loading Truck with Contaminated Sediment



Decontaminating Truck at Sawyer Street

thousands of times higher than the site's PCB cleanup goals. Although other areas of the harbor have similar levels of PCB contamination, this northern stretch is of concern due to the residential and recreational land use along the shore.

### Health Risks

The biggest health risk from New Bedford Harbor is eating PCB-contaminated seafood (don't eat seafood caught in the harbor). Skin contact with PCB-contaminated sediment is also a health concern. Breathing airborne PCBs poses much lower health risks than eating contaminated seafood and touching contaminated sediment-- and this risk can only happen after breathing high airborne levels of PCBs for a long time.

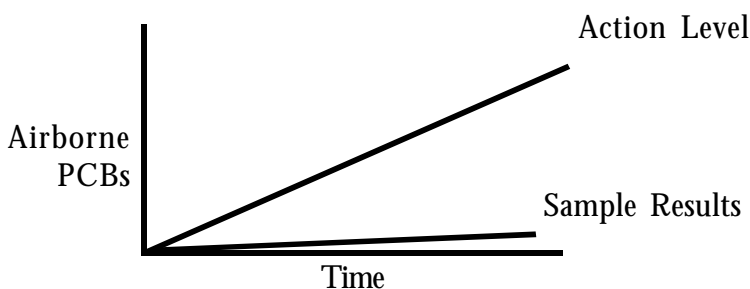
### Air Quality Monitoring

EPA monitors for airborne PCBs on a set schedule to make sure that cleanup activities are not causing airborne PCB levels that pose a health risk to area residents or cleanup workers. EPA has monitors around

the excavation site and the holding cells at Sawyer Street.

**Results show airborne PCB levels are extremely low: too low to pose a health risk even if one breathed the detected levels for a long time.**

- ◆ Even the highest results falls far below the level requiring any corrective action.
- ◆ From 11/18/02 to 1/23/03: results from 31 individual PCB air monitoring samples ranged from 1 to 46 ng/m<sup>3</sup> (nanograms per cubic meter of air -- a nanogram is one-billionth of a gram).
- ◆ To put this amount of PCBs detected in perspective: airborne PCB concentrations below 1,000 ng/m<sup>3</sup> for adult workers are considered safe by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.
- ◆ In addition to this workplace standard, EPA tracks the amount of measured airborne PCBs over time and compares these amounts to an action level, shown below.



**Worst-Case Results of Airborne PCBs**

## Confirming Cleanup Success

Once the contaminated material is removed, the remaining sediment or shoreline soils will be tested to make sure PCB levels are below the cleanup goals. For the harbor cleanup, four different PCB concentration levels have been set depending on land use and habitat. For example, shoreline areas next to residences will be cleaned to a 1 part per million (ppm) level while shoreline areas in public parks will be cleaned to 25 ppm. Wetland areas, where public access is not expected, will be cleaned to 50 ppm, while subtidal areas and mudflats will be cleaned to 10 ppm.

## Site History

The New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site is an 18,000 acre urban estuary reaching from the upper Acushnet River into Buzzards Bay. Its sediment is highly contaminated with PCBs and heavy metals. PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are man-made, 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 New Bedford Harbor Superfund cleanup plan calls for the dredging, dewatering and disposal of PCB-contaminated sediment at an off-site licensed landfill and in three shoreline confined disposal facilities. Around 500,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments will be dredged - roughly 75 football fields each filled 3 feet deep. Construction of the waterfront bulkheads for the dewatering facility is underway and dredging of the harbor is scheduled to begin in 2004.

## For More Information Contact:

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