

# Superfund site cleanup continues

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

The cleanup of Superfund site Portland Harbor — from river mile one to 11.8, or from approximately Sauvie Island to Swan Island — has another three years of preparatory work before the in-river work begins, say Department of Environmental Quality project managers doing the upland pollution work.

The harbor, located in the Willamette River just above where it feeds into the Columbia River, and the Columbia itself are among the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's ceded lands, where Tribal ancestors used to fish and trade.

Four presentations at a Jan. 14 meeting of the Portland Harbor Community Advisory Group provided the update.

Controlling pollution sources on land above the harbor that still may leach into the harbor must first be neutralized, capped, removed or otherwise eliminated before work in the harbor begins.

"The last thing anybody wants to see," said Jim Anderson, state Department of Environmental Quality Portland Harbor Section manager, "is an expensive and time consuming in-river cleanup only to be recontaminated by an upland source of pollution."

DEQ is the lead agency on the upland sources of pollution and the federal Environmental Protection Agency is the lead agency on the harbor cleanup.

The two are "partners," Anderson said, with EPA looking over the DEQ's upland work, though when it comes to the in-harbor cleanup, DEQ will not be tasked with looking over the EPA work.

The project, in motion since 1995, had found 17 cleanup sites by 1998. Today, that number includes more than 50 sites, Anderson said.

The principle contaminants in the

harbor are PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), non-conducting fluids used in a great number of manufacturing processes, from the making of transformers to lubricants to paints and adhesives. The EPA banned production of PCBs in the 1970s, after its polluting properties were discovered, but by then it was already contaminating rivers and streams, in water and upland, across the country.

To date, the DEQ Harbor cleanup group has named eight high priority sites and "eight more that may be high priority sites," Anderson said.

In addition, the group has taken on the examination of two new sources of potential pollution for the harbor: stormwater and sediment contamination.

Karen Tarnow, DEQ Stormwater specialist, said that the group isolated 125 sites of potential contamination. Fifty have either been fixed or determined not to be a threat, she said. Twenty-five are on "the front end," which means they are the most likely, so far, to be potential problems. The last 75 are still being evaluated, she said.

DEQ is working with the City of Portland on this project, and some of the time required to do it right means waiting for "a rainy season" to see what happens to the outflows into the harbor then.

From river miles 12 to 16, or roughly from the Steel Bridge to Ross Island, DEQ manager of the Lower Willamette section Keith Johnson is leading the downtown Portland Sedimentation effort.

"The downtown riverside has changed dramatically," he said, but his group found that "there never was much sedimentation investigation done."

The preliminary assessment from the group has found 83 locations of interest, from stormwater outfalls to riverfront industries, past and

present.

"We're performing a benthic survey," he said, that asks the question, "What's living in the sediment."

The preliminary results are just in, he said, and evaluation is beginning. The questions to be answered, he said, include whether the level of contamination is acceptable and, if not, what needs to be done about it?

This is a new area, he added, because water quality projects do not usually deal with sediment.

The presentation by DEQ's Cleanup Project Manager Matt McClincy provided an overview of four cleanup projects currently underway — the Evraz Oregon Steel Mills site, the ARCO site, the Gasco Siltronic site and the Arkema site.

All have upland and riverbank contamination, and a range of fixes have been and continue to be employed. Where the groundwater is contaminated, McClincy said, groundwater extraction wells have captured the water on the way to the harbor, cleaned it and then sent it along its way.

Where the riverbank is contaminated, the project has built seawalls to keep contaminants from moving further into the harbor, and the contaminated riverbank has been removed and replaced with clean fill. They have been working on bank design to prevent erosion, and follow that by attempting to integrate habitat into the clean riverbank area, though "previous efforts at other facilities have not worked," he said. "The goal is to integrate habitat into the remedial process."

In some cases, DEQ has been able to biodegrade contamination.

At the Arkema site, DEQ is considering constructing an entirely new stormwater system. Back

in the 1940s, Agent Orange was manufactured in this area.

While all the upland work is scheduled to be done at the end of 2010, the EPA expects that date to be pushed back at least six months.

According to Judy Smith, EPA's Pacific Northwest Region Community Involvement Coordinator for the Portland Harbor Superfund site, the delay will "allow us to complete work on analysis of the data collected. The further we get into the process the clearer a picture we have of how long it's going to take us to do a really good job."

The Grand Ronde Tribe's Natural Resources pointman for the cleanup, Ceded Lands Manager Mike Karnosh, said it might be pushed back a year before it is done.

The big question, Karnosh said, is "what level will the river be cleaned up to?" And, he added, until it is all done, there will still be the question of recontamination.

An EPA report that came out the day after the meeting said that the Columbia River system still contains four pollutants — PCBs, DDT, mercury, and fire retardant — that continue to pose an "unacceptable risk" to the public.

The Portland Harbor sits at the lower end of the Willamette River, just before it empties into the Columbia, so many of these contaminants cited in the new EPA report would have to backwash into the Willamette to further contaminate the Superfund site, Karnosh said.

"Even though the Lower Willamette is a tidally-influenced river, it's highly unlikely that contaminants from the Columbia are deposited in the Willamette," Karnosh said.

For detailed information about the project, take a look at the DEQ Web site: [www.deq.state.or.us/lq/cu/nwr/portlandharbor/index.htm](http://www.deq.state.or.us/lq/cu/nwr/portlandharbor/index.htm). ■

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## Grandparents support group to be held

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support group will meet from 10:30 a.m. to noon Thursday, Feb. 19, in the Elders' Activity Center.

The February topic of discussion will be "Interventions: Parenting Young Children." Presenters will be Dawn Cottrell from Yamhill County Health & Human Services' Family and Youth Programs and Jeff Lukehart from the Center for Successful Living Northwest Senior & Disability Services.

For more information, call Carmen Mercier at 503-879-1646.

## Winter recycle center hours

The recycle center will be open during the following hours: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, and 8 a.m. to noon Saturdays. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may cause you, but we have found it necessary to put tighter control on this service. **NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO DUMP PERSONAL GARBAGE OR YARD DEBRIS AT THE SITE.** If you see someone abusing this privilege, contact Mike Larsen at 503-879-2407.