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Cumberland Bay sludge bed studied

► Officials aren't sure whether to leave it alone or remove it

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Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — PCB contamination in the Cumberland Bay sludge bed has not spread to other areas of the bay.

The state's Department of Environmental Conservation is in the midst of extensive research on how large the contamination is and where it could have come

from.

Last year, officials gathered samples from throughout the bay, and those findings have shown no signs of contamination on the lake bottom other than the sludge bed.

"The sludge bed covers a bigger area than we first thought, but one of our main concerns was how extensive the contamination was in other parts of the lake," said Robert Edwards, project manager for DEC.

"Fortunately, it looks like the contamination is contained within the waste material (from

the sludge bed) itself."

The bed is composed of wood pulp, wood chips and other processing wastes. State officials are trying to pinpoint the source of the debris, but Edwards said there has been no significant developments in that research.

He did say the PCBs were probably placed there when the sludge bed was being created several decades ago.

Untreated waste disposal to the bay ended in the early 1970s when the City of Plattsburgh's sewage-treatment plant began

treating wastes from local industries.

An extensive cleanup program to remove contaminated pulp from the local beaches began last spring. Workers took nearly 200 tons of debris from the area. They returned periodically throughout the summer to remove debris that had washed up on shore.

That work will continue this year.

But now officials will begin deciding what should be done with the sludge bed itself. If no

action is taken, the cost for continued beach cleaning would about \$200,000 a year.

If the bed is removed, the cost could reach nearly \$18 million.

"It's a big project. No matter which way we go, we'll be spending a lot of money," Edwards said. "What we want to do is take a look at the options and decide which way to go."

The main option is whether to construct an on-site disposal facility or remove the waste to an off-site facility, which would cost about \$5.5 million more.

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Remedial action probably would not begin until 1997. The cleanup is expected to take about two years.

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Home seriously damaged

