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Sending sludge On its way

Residents don't want PCB debris landfilled near Lake Champlain

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PLATTSBURGH — Residents of the Cumberland Bay shoreline want PCB-contaminated debris removed from the bay and taken out of the area for disposal.

At an informational meeting, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation laid out its options for removing the contaminated sludge bed. About two dozen residents and lakefront business owners attended.

Building landfill one option

"I'm definitely in favor of removing the sludge, but I don't think we should build a landfill for it," said one resident, referring to an option that would require construction of a landfill near Wilcox Dock to hold the waste removed from the sludge bed.

DEC officials discussed several options, including transporting the debris to a local or commercial landfill. That idea was looked upon more favorably by the residents on hand, even though it would cost nearly \$5.5 million more to complete.

"We're not here to recommend one option over another," said DEC spokesman Steve Hammond. "We just want to provide you information on the options and then get feedback from you."

34 acres of sludge

The sludge bed, located between the breakwater south of Wilcox Dock and the developed area south of Scomotion Creek, consists of about 34 acres of woodpulp, woodchips and other debris. The bed is about one-to-two-feet thick in most areas but is as much as 10 feet deep around the dock where it had been dredged for barge traffic.

"We believe there's about 93,000 cubic yards of solid waste in the sludge bed," said DEC Project Engineer Robert Edwards. "We're very confident the sludge is the source of PCBs in fish in the bay."

There is an advisory against eating several species of fish caught in the bay, including yellow perch. The state's Department of Health has banned commercial sale of perch caught in the bay.

Dredging machine to be used

Any option the state chooses will involve mechanical dredging of the sludge bed. A small boat

YOU CAN STILL COMMENT

The Department of Environmental Conservation will hold a written comment period until April 15. Anyone with suggestions or comments can write to Robert Edwards at the Division of Hazardous Waste Remediation, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 50 Wolf Road, Albany, N.Y. 12233.

will hold the dredger, which vacuums debris from the lake bottom. The debris is then suctioned by hose to storage tanks on shore where it goes through an extensive dewatering process.

The water removed from the debris will have to be treated and either returned to the bay or sent to the Plattsburgh Wastewater Treatment Facility for further treatment.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are cancer-causing chemicals that accumulate in animal fat if ingested. In nature, they tend to form around organic material, so they are much more prevalent in the wood debris than in the water.

People can become contaminated with PCBs by eating fish that have been poisoned or by accidentally eating or coming into close contact with contaminated debris.

May wash up

Although officials have said the danger of physical contact is minimal, they have been concerned about wood chips breaking from the sludge bed and washing up on shore. Last year, the state picked up about 70 tons of debris from the sandy beaches near the sludge bed.

If the state constructs a landfill on site, it would probably be on the undeveloped shoreline behind Georgia-Pacific. Once the dredging is completed and all the solid waste is placed in the landfill, it would be capped with dirt and topsoil and would not pose any kind of health risk.

In fact, Gary Kerzic, from Rust Engineers, the firm DEC hired to plan removal of the sludge bed, said the hidden landfill would make a prime recreational spot and access site to Lake Champlain.