

# Portland Harbor Superfund Cleanup

## Project Background

Portland Harbor is a heavily industrialized stretch of the Willamette River between downtown Portland, Oregon and the confluence with the Columbia River. By the mid-1980's, it was known that industrial use of Portland Harbor had led to soil and groundwater contamination on both sides of the river. By the mid-1990's, the Gould, Inc. and McCormick and Baxter industrial sites within Portland Harbor had been added to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Priorities List of highly contaminated sites. DEQ was overseeing cleanups at 18 additional sites in Portland Harbor. Several of the sites were known to have released contaminants to the Willamette River, but the full extent of river sediment contamination was not known.

In March 1997, DEQ and EPA began a joint study of river sediments in the Portland Harbor area. Near-shore sediment samples were collected in September and October 1997 (when the Willamette was at its lowest seasonal levels) and analyzed for a variety of contaminants. The study, completed in May 1998, found contaminated sediments throughout the harbor area. Contaminants detected included metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), chlorinated pesticides, and dioxin. Contamination appeared to be highest adjacent to on-shore sites already known to be contaminated.

## State-Led Cleanup Effort

Based on the results of the joint sediment investigation, EPA determined that the entire Portland Harbor might qualify for listing on the National Priorities List. EPA often leads cleanups of National Priorities List sites, but DEQ had the opportunity to develop a management plan that would allow Oregon to lead the cleanup of the Harbor.

In November 1998, the Port of Portland, the City of Portland, and 8 industrial property owners formed the Portland Harbor Group, and agreed to work together to develop a management plan to clean up the contaminated sediments. The management plan established the framework for the sediment investigation and described DEQ oversight. It was completed in June 1999.

In October 1999, DEQ began preparation of a remedial investigation and feasibility study work plan to be implemented by the Portland Harbor Group. The work plan was drafted with participation of the Portland Harbor Group, local Government representatives, natural resource trustees, Tribal representatives, community representatives and environmental groups.

## Superfund Listing

Through the remedial investigation and feasibility study Work Plan, sediment management plan and other efforts, DEQ met many of EPA's requirements for a state-led cleanup. However, due to the lack of an agreement between the potentially responsible parties and natural resource trustees on natural resource damages, EPA proposed the Portland Harbor Sediment site for listing on the National Priorities List in July 2000.

A final listing occurred on December 1, 2000. The listing specifies that EPA is the lead agency for the in-water portion of the remedial investigation and feasibility study, while the State is the lead agency for the upland portion. Both agencies are coordinating closely with 6 Tribal governments and the other natural resource trustees for the site. The trustees are designated by law to act on behalf of the public or Tribes to protect and manage natural resources.

A Memorandum of Understanding was negotiated between EPA, DEQ, 6 Tribes, and state and federal Natural Resource Trustees. The Memorandum of Understanding established EPA as the lead agency for the in-water sediment and surface water contamination and DEQ as the lead agency for upland investigations and source control. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by all parties in 2001.

## Lower Willamette Group is formed

In January 2001, EPA began negotiating an Administrative Order on Consent for the completion of a remedial investigation and feasibility study with a group of Portland Harbor property owners. This group, known as the Lower Willamette Group, includes businesses along the Willamette River, the Port of Portland, and the City of Portland. The Administrative Order on Consent was finalized in September



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2001. Initial investigations were performed during fall 2001 and spring 2002, for the purpose of developing a remedial investigation and feasibility study work plan. A draft remedial investigation and feasibility study work plan was submitted in June 2002. Although the initial work plan was not approved, EPA approved an initial round of sampling to proceed during the summer and fall 2002. Key elements of the 2002 sampling effort focused on fish tissue sampling, sediment sampling and developing an understanding of the physical nature of the Willamette River.

### **Current Status**

In June 2004, EPA gave final approval to the programmatic work plan identifying the activities that must be carried out in order to complete the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS) for the Portland Harbor Superfund Site. The work plan provides a road map and schedule to ensure the RI/FS is completed on time and with high quality information. EPA also approved the Round 2 Field Sampling Plans, which provide detailed direction on how, when and where the data gathering effort will be conducted, and how the data will be subsequently analyzed. A comprehensive field sampling effort is expected to begin in July.

DEQ continues to work with individual property owners to clean up sites along the banks of the Willamette River. The work ranges from the early stages of investigation to cleanup activities and determinations of No Further Action. There are approximately 64 upland investigations underway in Portland Harbor under DEQ oversight. The focus of these investigations is identifying and controlling upland sources of harbor sediment contamination.

### **Other Superfund cleanups within Portland Harbor**

The cleanup at the Gould Superfund site within Portland Harbor is complete. Completion of the state-led Superfund cleanup at the McCormick & Baxter Creosoting Company site is expected by the end of 2005. Work is underway this summer to install a protective sediment cap in the river bottom designed to prevent harmful pollutants from migrating into the Willamette. Next summer, installation of an upland soil cap will complete cleanup work at the site.

### **Environmental Concerns**

Fish collected within Portland Harbor are known to be contaminated with PCBs, dioxin, chlorinated pesticides such as DDT and mercury. In June 2004, the Oregon Department of Human Services issued a fish advisory warning people to

limit their consumption of resident fish caught in Portland Harbor. In addition, several areas of sediment contamination that threaten fish and wildlife are known to be present within Portland Harbor.

### **Alternative Formats**

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