

EPA , Region 10

Portland Harbor Superfund Comments from The Cathedral Park Neighborhood

Portland's economic future will not be driven by smokestack industries. Outsourcing , automation, and robotics will define an industry future of declining revenue streams. A cleanup adequate to a working harbor will be insufficient for the changing economic realities. The software and web companies relocating to Portland are coming in response to our image of livability and open social networks. Perpetuating the life of a dirty river running through the civic center is destructive to this future.

The Cathedral Park Neighborhood encompasses one of the longest river frontages of any residential neighborhood in all of the Willamette Superfund designation. Our health and welfare are directly impacted by the choices made to restore the river environment. Our historic community does not reflect the average two year river toxin exposure postulated on page 17 of the EPA cleanup proposal. This is home. Like the people of Libby, Montana, we don't know the complications of long term exposure to industrial waste. We do know that this is our last, best chance to have a clean and healthful environment. And we expect restitution from the ignorant or criminal polluters to fund the necessary repairs.

**The EPA poses nine criteria for judging the cleanup alternatives.**

**1) The state, city and federal governments have a poor history in Oregon of protecting human health and the environment.** The Oregon legislature recently exempted the Port of Portland from regulatory oversight of the dredging spoils deposited on Hayden Island. This is the same material subjected to exhaustive testing in the riverbed. The Oregon DEQ has a history of looking the other way when pollution and profits conflict. The City of Portland has resolved its dual role of PRP and protector of public welfare in favor of compromises to protect their budgets. This leaves only the EPA with the integrity to protect our health and environment. However, the preferred alternative has some issues.

a) The amount of material targeted for removal from the river is inadequate. On page 65 this is acknowledged. " Alternative i will leave contamination in place above levels that allow unlimited use and unrestricted exposure." The estimates are that tons of PCB's will remain in the river. We don't want that. Alternative G permanently removes a safer amount.

b) The proposal downplays airborne pathways. Recent studies have shown breathing will bio-accumulate even PCB's. And they do volatilize. This relates back to spoils on Hayden Island, contaminated uplands, and disturbance created by the remediation process itself. How do we protect ourselves? Everyone needs to breathe.

c) The confinement facility remains in the proposal. My recent testimony before the Port Commissioners engendered an email response to the effect that the Port would withdraw it's sponsorship of the CDF at terminal four. Proximity to our

neighborhood and perpetual responsibility for other PRP's toxins seemed to figure prominently in the reversal of intent.

d) We are a neighborhood on the riverbank. We recreate at the waters edge. We need the riverbank to be clean enough to support our activities. Signage and fences are an admission of failure.

**2) Compliance with the Record of Decision needs to be formally drafted into Record of Decision.** The resistance to accepting responsibility for harming the community highlights a need for performance bonds. Funding needs to be guaranteed beyond a one and done perspective to ensure completion of environmental remediation and successful restoration. Additionally, the State of Oregon needs to document a legally binding commitment to faithfully follow through on promises to clean the river bank and uplands to uncompromised, healthful, safe, and legal standards. It is not enough to delegate authority to DEQ. EPA needs to maintain oversight and responsibility.

The idea of splitting the Superfund site into separate and independent operating units suggests the possibility that PRP's may apply political pressure to compromise the integrity of the cleanup. Under the oversight and jurisdiction of the EPA, multiple sites can be remediated concurrently with all parties observing the same rules of conduct. Cleanup requires a level playing field for all.

**3) Long term effectiveness and permanence need careful consideration.** Given the proposed plan's reliance on monitored or enhanced natural recovery, the time frame of monitoring needs to be extended out beyond 100 years or more. Many of the toxins in the river show little evidence of degrading in the many years they have already been in the river. If they are to be controlled in perpetuity by capping or similar means, provisions need to be made to maintain the integrity of these barriers as long as the toxins remain active. Monitored natural recovery has a questionable history of working on the Hudson and Passaic rivers.

The GAO has apparently determined that institutional controls are not protective. Signage, fencing and deed restrictions offer little evidence of safeguarding the public. The cleanup needs to be sufficiently adequate to remove the need for these stopgap measures.

The proposed CDF is an unstable structure to be built in a flood plain, on an earthquake fault, with ground water flowing through to wash contaminants back into the river. Why bother?

It is important that the full cost of environmental restoration be funded. Habitat must be continually worked until it can successfully maintain itself in the natural world.

**4) The potential for cost savings through the application of new technologies seems to be understated in the proposed Plan i.** Future sites in other locations

will benefit from knowledge gained from trying them on this site. We can benefit from the learning curve. Bacteria, sediment washing, and oven cooking to breakdown PCB's all have potential to minimize transportation expenses.

**5) Time to completion is a function of a number of variables.** For example, The Cathedral Park Neighborhood, in conjunction with the graduating class of Urban Planners at PSU in the year 2015, conducted extensive polling, canvassing, and charrettes among the neighborhood to determine that residents favored accelerated cleanup and it's negatives over a longer period of moderate activity. This choice was influenced by a minimal awareness of ongoing channel dredging by the Port of Portland. Additionally, multiple sites can be worked simultaneously. This has the potential to shorten the duration of the project.

In the short term, workers, community, and the environment all benefit from a real time, interactive web site. Air quality needs 24 hour monitoring to protect all parties. Cofferdams, de-watering barges, hydraulic dredging, and environmental bucket dredging all serve to minimize impacts on the water column. Special consideration needs to be paid to volatilizing PCB's.

**6) Portland is a port city with rail, water and trucking options to remove contaminated sediments to a certified disposal site up the Columbia River.** Under no circumstances should a CDF be built inside the city limits to store toxic waste.

**7) How much of their personal health would the PRP's forego to build someone else's profits?** That is the dichotomy posed by their assertion that risk reduction benefits should be proportional to the costs of cleanup. There is no equivalency in this premise. They also ignore the compounded profits they gained by using the river as an open sewer. Restitution isn't a business expense, it is a criminal penalty that they have no business negotiating. The consequences of environmental degradation on neighboring residential populations condemn these people to restricted opportunity in a competitive world. Oregon has a long history of compromising health and safety in less affluent neighborhoods to promote industrial benefit. That needs to stop. Several representatives of the PRP's boasted to an assemblage of PHCAG members that they recreate by going fishing, but they know better than to fish in the Willamette. The numbers for the cleanup sound huge, out of context in a headline, but spread out over 150 PRP's with valuations in the billions, they reflect a reasonable price to restore Portland's heritage.

**8) The city of Portland and the State of Oregon's DEQ share a history of responding to political pressure to enhance industry profits.** I give no credence to the self serving positions they are taking on the EPA's alternative i. We no longer live in a medieval world in Portland.

**9) Community acceptance of the EPA's proposal I is best reflected by the record numbers of public comments flooding the regional offices.** The PHCAG

and associated Tribes and community groups have overcome desultory support from the EPA and City to accomplish unexpected outreach. Portland wants it's river back.

The Cathedral Park neighborhood Association supports Alternative G and all enhancements that restore an unconditionally clean and healthy river to all of Portland.

Respectfully,  
Doug Larson,  
Chairman, Cathedral Park Neighborhood Association  
Member, PHCAG

Larson.dg@gmail.com