

PESTICIDES • DIOXIN • LEAD • ARSENIC • PCBs

Cleaning Up Our Toxic River

CANOING • WATERSKIING

FISHING • SWIMMING • BOATING • DRINKING • BIRDING

THE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Unsafe levels of toxic chemicals lie along the bottom of the Willamette River downstream of Oregon City. DEQ is proposing to lead the clean-up of the most industrialized section (6 miles between Swan and Sauvie Islands), called the Portland Harbor, in order to avoid its designation as a federal Superfund site.

What Are You Being Asked?

After years of foot-dragging, state and federal pollution agencies have decided to do something about the unsafe levels of toxic chemicals in the Portland Harbor of the Willamette River. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) wants to turn the river into a Superfund site and use federal resources to clean it up. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) wants to work with industry to get them to clean it up voluntarily. You are being asked to tell both agencies which approach you want and what you think about DEQ's report.

Will DEQ's Proposal Protect the Environment & Human Health?

- DEQ's proposal is really a report, not a plan. It does not make commitments and does not include timelines for decisions. For example, the Plan notes DEQ has enforcement authority, describes its programs, but never establishes when and how it will enforce the law if voluntary approaches fail.
- DEQ's report is based on working cooperatively with industry, the Port of Portland, and the City of Portland. Yet DEQ's desire to get along with polluters is the reason why nothing has been done to clean up the Willamette for so many years. The report does not demonstrate a change in this approach.

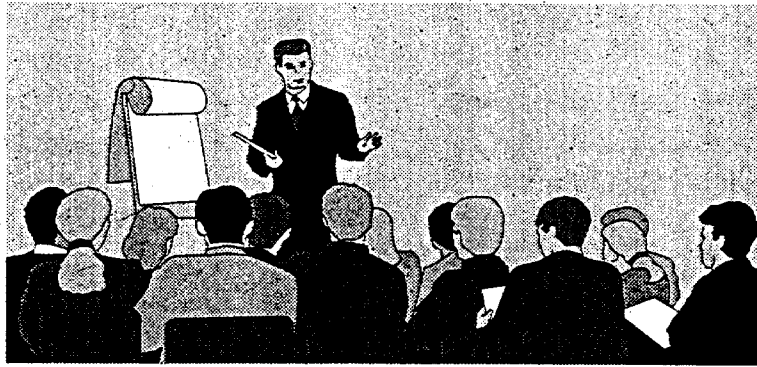
- DEQ says its approach offers "coordination and integration" of existing activities and programs but there is little to integrate because DEQ has neither done nor planned much. DEQ does not explain what the work is and how it will use other programs and laws to enhance the clean-up project.
- DEQ wants to keep the clean-up focused on the 6 miles of the Portland Harbor so it will not consider the effects of Harbor toxics on eagles, mink, and otter of the Columbia River Estuary or possible impacts to Multnomah Channel.
- DEQ's testing upstream of the Portland Harbor is intended to find other industries to help pay the bill, not to expand the scope of the clean-up to encompass the entire problem. DEQ will not include other clean-up sites in this project.
- The report does not explain how it will address the needs of fish that have been listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.
- DEQ assumes that people who use the river for boating, recreation, jet skiing, swimming, and wading are at no risk from contact or ingestion of toxic contaminants but provides no factual support for its conclusion.
- The report does not establish how clean-up activities will be coordinated with on-going and new dredging.

- DEQ will not require clean-up of specific sites to levels below current conditions found throughout the river, even if the current conditions are unsafe. How these current conditions are determined could have a significant impact on the clean-up levels required for specific sites.
- The DEQ report states that if contamination is found throughout the river that poses risks, it "may" warrant remediation. But, DEQ has already decided to do nothing about river-wide contamination.

Who Will Really Make Decisions?

- DEQ wants the job of evaluating and cleaning up the toxic chemicals in the Portland Harbor so that the Port of Portland can deepen the shipping channel of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. This overriding purpose threatens the scientific integrity of the clean-up program.

- DEQ is committed to working "collaboratively" with the polluting industries along the river. These industries will pay the bills and have a big say in the clean-up, compromising DEQ's ability to make sure that the work protects the health of people, fish, and wildlife.



Would EPA's Superfund Program Do a Better Job?

- EPA does not have the same political need that DEQ does to protect local industry, the City of Portland, and the Port of Portland, making the federal agency a better choice.
- EPA could use the Clean Water Act to determine how much toxic pollution should be allowed into the Columbia River Estuary to determine how much toxic inputs are safe.
- Superfund listing will affect the Port's proposal to deepen the shipping channel of the Willamette. The purpose of the state program is to allow business as usual, ignoring the effects of toxic chemicals and risks to endangered salmon.

Will You Have a Say in How the Harbor is Cleaned Up?

- DEQ prepared its report with industries and other agencies. The report does not demonstrate why we should believe that business interests will not override public interests.
- Public input into the report was an afterthought and public involvement plans are sketchy.
- The federal Superfund program provides funds to ensure that the public has its own technical analysis. DEQ does not provide assurances that sufficient funds will be available to review the enormous technical review effort, which includes at least 17 separate sites along with the River.

This and other fact sheets produced by Northwest Environmental Advocates were produced under a public outreach grant from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. The opinions expressed are those of NWEA and are not intended to reflect the views of the granting agency.



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