

News Release

Region 2 - New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands



EPA Releases Plan to Address PCB Contamination in the Grasse River in Massena, New York

Public Urged to Submit Comments No Later Than November 15

Contact: Larisa Romanowski, (518) 747-4389, romanowski.larisa@epa.gov

(New York, N.Y. – October 1, 2012) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed a plan to clean up contaminated river sediment at the Grasse River Superfund site in Massena, New York. Past industrial activities have contaminated the river sediment with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which are potentially cancer-causing chemicals that build up in the food chain and accumulate in the fatty tissue of fish and mammals. The proposed plan requires dredging and capping of contaminated sediment in a 7.2 mile stretch of river. Approximately 109,000 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment would be dredged from near-shore areas of the river and backfilled with clean material. Dredged sediment would be disposed of at a permitted, secure onsite landfill. In the river's main channel, approximately 59 acres of contaminated sediment would be covered with an armored cap and another approximately 225 acres of contaminated sediment would be capped with clean sand and gravel to isolate the contamination from the surrounding environment.

The EPA will hold several formal public meetings and informal information sessions in Akwesasne and Massena, N.Y. to discuss its plan. The EPA is encouraging the public to comment on the plan through November 15, 2012.

Akwesasne Meetings: Monday, October 29, 2012

Public Information Session: 1 - 3 p.m.

St. Regis Mohawk School

Multipurpose Room (Use Visitor's Entrance)

385 Church Street

Akwesasne, NY 13655

Public Meeting: 7 - 9 p.m.

Office for the Aging - Seniors

Dining Hall

29 Business Park Road

Akwesasne, NY 13655

Massena Meetings: Tuesday, October 30, 2012

Public Information Session: 1 - 3 p.m.

Massena Town Hall

60 Main Street

Board Room #30

Massena, NY 13662

Public Meeting: 7 - 9 p.m.

Same as Day Location - Massena Town Hall

From the 1950's until the mid-1970's, the Alcoa West facility in Massena, NY released wastes from its aluminum production and fabrication activities, including PCBs and other hazardous substances, onto the facility property and into the Grasse River. As a result, sediment in the waters near the Alcoa West facility and approximately seven miles downstream have been contaminated. In 1989, the EPA issued an Administrative Order that required Alcoa to investigate the extent of contamination in a portion of the river, to evaluate cleanup options, and to design and implement a cleanup plan to be selected by the EPA.

In 1995 Alcoa dredged about 3,000 cubic yards of highly contaminated sediment from an area near an outfall at the Alcoa facility. Since that time a number of studies have been conducted by Alcoa to evaluate cleanup options for the site. In 2001, Alcoa tested a variety of materials to be used as a cap over the contaminated sediments and also a variety of methods of putting a cap over the sediments. This testing took place in a 7-acre area of the Grasse River. While Alcoa did develop some recommended options for dredging and capping, subsequent monitoring in 2003 showed that some of the caps placed during the study were lost and some underlying river sediment had eroded as a result of ice scouring the bottom of the river. As a result, the EPA directed Alcoa to re-evaluate cleanup options for the site to account for scouring caused by severe "ice jam" events. Alcoa then evaluated pilot-scale dredging, armored capping and thin-layer capping. In addition, the company evaluated an innovative technology involving the addition of activated carbon to river sediments and also looked at ways to address ice jams on the lower Grasse River.

The results of the studies have been carefully examined and were used to develop the cleanup plan proposed by the EPA. The plan includes dredging and placement of backfill in the near-shore portion of the river. In addition, the plan calls for the placement of a thick armored cap in the upper two miles of the river's main channel, where the sediment is susceptible to ice scouring when there are severe ice jams. The remaining five-mile stretch of the main channel will be capped with a sand and gravel. Also under the proposed plan, habitat that is impacted by the cleanup will be fully restored. The proposed plan also requires long-term monitoring of the capped areas to ensure that the caps remain intact, and monitoring of fish, water and habitat.

The Superfund program operates on the principle that polluters should pay for cleanups, rather than passing the cost to taxpayers. The EPA searches for parties responsible for the contamination and holds them accountable for the costs of investigations and cleanups. The investigation and cleanup of the Grasse River Superfund site is being conducted and paid for by Alcoa, Inc. with oversight by the EPA. The estimated cost of the proposed cleanup is \$243 million.

The cleanup of the contamination at the Alcoa West facility property and upland areas is being conducted by Alcoa under a series of Consent Orders with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. EPA and the state are overseeing the cleanup of the river and the state is overseeing the upland cleanup.

Written comments on EPA's proposed plan may be mailed or emailed to:

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OR, contact Larisa Romanowski, Community Involvement Coordinator, at (518) 747-4389; romanowski.larisa@epa.gov.

The EPA has a web page about the site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/region2/superfund/npl/aluminumcompany/>

Follow the EPA Region 2 on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/eparegion2> and visit our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/eparegion2>.

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