

State of Oregon  
Department of Environmental Quality

Memorandum

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**Date:** March 13, 2013

**To:** Environmental Quality Commission

**From:** Dick Pedersen, Director

**Subject:** Agenda item M, Informational item: Portland Harbor update  
March 20-21, 2013, EQC meeting

**Purpose of item** This item will update the commission about cleanup activities for Portland Harbor, and DEQ's ongoing role in the process.

**Why this is important** EPA listed Portland Harbor on the National Priority List in December 2000 making it a federal Superfund project. The listing includes about 11 river miles generally around the Swan Island area of Portland. The area has been heavily industrialized for over 100 years, with activities including ship building, maintenance and de-commissioning, pesticide manufacturing, manufactured-gas plants, bulk petroleum storage terminals and wood treating. Portland Harbor plays a very important role in the local, state and regional economy, and provides diverse opportunities for recreation and aquatic and terrestrial ecological habitat. EPA is the lead agency for in-water work, and items related to that work, and DEQ is the lead agency for upland source control work.

**In-water work, remedial investigation and feasibility study** Portland Harbor sediment contamination largely results from past industrial practices, such as direct disposal to the river, direct discharge to the river and overwater releases. Contamination has been greatly reduced over the past several decades due to stronger regulatory laws, discharge permits and general environmental awareness.

The sediment contamination must be removed or controlled, and EPA is the main agency responsible for the oversight of this part of the cleanup. EPA initially identified 10 parties, known as the Lower Willamette Group, that were responsible for contamination in Portland Harbor. Since that initial group formed in 2001, EPA has identified about 100 other potentially-responsible parties that must participate in the cleanup work. These partners must work together to create an EPA-accepted feasibility study for the cleanup, and EPA anticipates this study being approved by November 2013.

After November 2013, EPA and the partners will write a proposed plan, which will be issued for public comment in late 2014. By summer 2015, EPA intends to issue a final decision, which will outline site boundaries

and other project specifics.

The final decision and project plan will be used by the partners to begin remediation of contamination and take other cleanup actions, as early as 2015. DEQ, as the state environmental regulatory authority, is interested in seeing the process move forward effectively and efficiently, so environmental protections can be implemented as soon as possible.

**Upland source controls**

DEQ's main responsibility on the project is upland source control. Upland source control focuses on identifying, evaluating and, if necessary, controlling land-based sources of contamination to the river that pose a re-contamination threat. Upland contamination can be transported to the river via groundwater, stormwater, runoff and bank erosion.

DEQ has identified and prioritized about 100 upland source sites in 2009 in the Portland Harbor reach that could require some type of control to prevent contamination. DEQ separated the sites into low, medium and high-priority, based on severity of contamination and likelihood of future re-contamination, and has closed 24 of the sites. Of the remaining open sites, DEQ designated 14 as high, 29 as medium and 29 as low priority. Most of the sites, regardless of priority, have at least some interim controls in place. DEQ continues its work with the sites, focusing on those designated high-priority, to implement controls and limit the possibility of re-contamination.

**Commission involvement**

There is no request for commission action at this time. DEQ can provide periodic updates on the status of the Portland Harbor work at the commission's request.

Approved:

Division: \_\_\_\_\_

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