

09.03.25

Dear Friend,

As we continue working through the investigation at Blakely Harbor under an Agreed Order (DE 16944) with the Washington State Department of Ecology, I'm writing to share an update.

Since 2022, Port Blakely has collected data to determine the reach and impacts of wood material that remains from sawmill operations on the site over 100 years ago. This information is necessary to evaluate potential cleanup actions for the site. We have completed 18 sampling events to date and plan to conduct another sampling event early this fall.

On September 22, 23 and 24th, a team from Anchor QEA will collect bulk sediment and porewater samples during low tide along the northern shoreline of Blakely Harbor, and in areas of the Harbor and Millpond. There will be two crews working from approximately 10 a.m.-2 p.m. each day – one by foot along the beach and another from a vessel offshore.

Results will provide additional information in areas where wood waste has not been tested so we can evaluate the extent of wood waste and decomposition products from the wood waste. As we collect samples, the Harbor and Park will remain open and accessible for public use as a recreational, environmental, and cultural resource for the Bainbridge Island community.

To provide additional information, I've provided responses to a few questions you may have about wood waste below. Additional information on wood waste can also be found at <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/161061>

I will continue to keep you apprised of major developments as we work with Ecology. Feel free to reach out to me directly or to Ecology's Site Manager, Rachel McDermott at (564) 233-9481 with any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Mike Warjone, President
Port Blakely US Forestry

Q+A: What to Know about Wood Waste

What is wood waste?

"Wood waste" is a term used to discuss different types of wood, including but not limited to: sawdust, wood scraps, bark/ chips from logs, whole logs, and dimensional lumber. Wood waste from industrial processes such as log rafting and milling differs from the wood naturally found in the environment. In Blakely Harbor, wood waste is present along the shoreline and in marine sediment from sawmill operations that occurred more than 100 years ago.

When is wood a problem in the environment? When is it not?

Not all wood is problematic. Naturally occurring large pieces of wood in water systems can provide shade, habitat or hiding places for small fish. When wood waste is present in unnaturally large volumes, particularly if the wood is small in size like sawdust, it can overwhelm the sediment environment and potentially harm ecosystems. This becomes problematic when toxicity from the wood decomposition impacts natural systems and organisms are unable to adapt, affecting aquatic plant and animal life. Wood waste impacts depend on many site-specific factors, ranging from the type of habitat to the wood volume, particle size and other physical attributes.

What are the findings of previous wood waste biological testing at Blakely Harbor?

Since 2020, several sediment, soil and groundwater sampling events have been conducted throughout the Harbor. The sampling included bioassays that directly measure the cumulative impact of wood waste and other chemicals on benthic organisms. To date, almost all of the bioassays passed, meaning that those sample locations comply with Ecology's benthic chemical criteria. Additional bioassay sampling is being conducted in shoreline and marine sediment areas not previously sampled but where wood waste is known to be present.

Are the pilings treated with creosote? Testing completed in 2022 indicates the majority of pilings were likely not treated with creosote. While many industrial sites in Puget Sound have wood pilings and timbers that were treated with creosote, pilings tested appear to be untreated wood.

What happens next?

With a goal to develop a cleanup action plan for Blakely Harbor as part of the agreed order with Ecology, Port Blakely will perform additional sediment sampling in nearshore areas where sawmill-related wood waste, such as sawdust, have been identified.

Sources:

Department of Ecology:

<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/161061>

Wood Waste Cleanup, September 2013 <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/0909044.pdf>

Blakely Harbor Park Fact Sheet

<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/14770>