Focus

Cascade Pole cleanup project commonly asked questions

Q: Why is the dredging necessary?

The main reason contaminated sediments are being removed from this site is because they threaten fish and other aquatic life. We are seeking to improve the health of Budd Inlet and put this Port of Olympia property back into productive use.

Q: Why does the work have to occur now, causing the north boat ramp to be closed?

The dredging is occurring now for two main reasons. First, we have a large series of low tides combined with daylight, which will help speed the work. Second, if we work now, we protect fish. Even though a floating curtain will keep fish out of the dredging area, this is the time of year when salmon are generally absent from the area, lowering their risk of exposure to contaminants. Unfortunately, the north boat ramp will be closed during the dredging, and we apologize for the inconvenience.

Q: How long will the dredging be going on?

We estimate the dredging work will take about five months.

Q: Will people living in the vicinity of the Cascade Pole cleanup site or visitors to the Swantown Marina be exposed to harmful levels of chemicals during excavation and removal of the sediments?

Swantown Marina residents and visitors may experience noise and stronger-than-usual marine odors during the dredging work. Experts do not anticipate any unsafe levels of airborne hazardous chemicals outside of the immediate dredging area during this period. The odor of creosote may be stronger than usual (the odor of treated telephone poles, pilings), because of the creosote in the sediments. Also, you might smell hydrogen sulfide, (the odor of rotten eggs). Hydrogen sulfide is commonly found in areas of historical wood products processing and storage. The odor comes from decayed plant and animal matter, petroleum, seaweed and biological waste. The human nose can detect it at levels far below any health risk.

The Port will be monitoring air for dust, organic vapors and hydrogen sulfide during the excavation. Placement of the air monitors will depend on wind directions. If readings above worker safety standards are measured, work will adapt or stop, depending on the levels.

If you are sensitive to odors and noise, you may wish to avoid the marina area as much as possible during the dredging. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience this may cause. We believe the short-term inconvenience will be worth the long-term gain to improve Budd Inlet's health.

For your health and safety, please stay well outside of the dredging and construction zone.

Q: How are people being protected from chemicals that may be released during the dredging of the contaminated sediments?

We do not believe harmful levels of chemicals will occur outside of the daily work areas. Signs will be posted to keep the general public out of the areas. Significant steps have been taken to minimize further spread of contaminated sediments beyond the daily work areas. We do not believe that areas adjacent to the work site, such as Priest Point Park and beach residences, will be affected. To confirm this, sediment and water testing will occur during and after the project.

In addition, site workers will monitor the air, wear protective clothing and follow a project-specific health and safety plan for their own welfare.

Q: Will contaminated dust be generated during the work? Will it be safe to breathe the air?

We anticipate little or no dust in the marine zone. The excavation will be a very wet, mucky operation. To keep dust down on the upland site, we plan to have tank trucks there to water down any dust that might be prone to kick up. Normal marine odors may be most prevalent, particularly if we have more warm temperatures. It will be safe to breathe the air, although it may smell bad.

Q: Is there a risk to adults and children playing on nearby beaches, such as Priest Point Park?

We do not believe sediment dredging will release any new contaminants to nearby beaches. To be sure, we will be taking water samples 150 feet from the outer edge of the dredging boundary at different depths. Samples will be taken continuously during the first week of dredging and will be checked weekly after that. Samples will be checked for standard water quality parameters -- dissolved oxygen, turbidity, pH and conductivity.

We are most interested in turbidity and dissolved oxygen levels. Turbidity is a measure of suspended solids, such as sediments. Increased turbidity might indicate sediments are escaping from the site. If high turbidity is found, we will stop work and find out what is causing it. Previous pilot dredging studies indicate that stirring and movement of sediments will be minimal due to various marine dredging containment controls.

Dissolved oxygen is a measure of the oxygen-carrying capacity of water. Low levels can harm aquatic life. If low dissolved oxygen levels are found, work could also stop to protect fish and aquatic life.

Q: Is there a risk in eating Budd Inlet shellfish or fish?

The state and county health departments prohibit shellfish harvesting around the Cascade Pole site and in lower Budd Inlet, due to both chemical and biological contamination. Do not eat shellfish from lower Budd Inlet. In addition, the south Puget Sound is experiencing major red tide this summer. Many of our beaches are closed to shellfishing due to paralytic shellfish poisoning. Most beaches are posted, but to be sure, call the Department of Health's shellfish hotline at 1-800-562-5632 or check their Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm .

The existing shellfishing closure for lower Budd is in place regardless of the dredging activity.

Yellow signs are posted warning people about bottom fish consumption, but there is no formal fishing advisory in Budd Inlet at this time (Consult state fishing regulations about seasons and catch limits).

The June 7, 2000 Health Statement on lower Budd Inlet published by the Thurston County Health Department recommends limits for human exposures to various environmental media. For a copy, call 360-786-7203 or visit the county's Web site at:
http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehadm/index.html

These precautions about shellfish and fish would be in place regardless of the Cascade Pole dredging work.

Q: Do the contaminated sediments contain cancer-causing chemicals? And, can they harm me?

The primary chemicals of concern are pentachlorphenol (PCP, or "penta"), creosote, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are either suspected or known human carcinogens. In addition, the most toxic form of dioxin (a by-product of PCP) is considered to be a human carcinogen.

Although hazardous chemicals are present in the marine sediments at the Cascade Pole site, there is no evidence that chronic (long-term) human contact with these contaminants has occurred or will occur during the dredging. As a result, health risks are low.

Unfortunately, these chemicals are common in the environment at sites where wood treating has occurred. They are also found at marinas, in piers, backyard fences, railroad ties and utility poles. We are just discovering how pervasive these chemicals are. The Department of Ecology is working to reduce Washington's reliance on PCP, which persists in the environment and can accumulate in the tissues of fish, animals and humans.

Q: Is this cleanup unique? Is anything like it happening anyplace elsewhere in Washington?

Yes, the cleanup is unique in that contaminated sediments will be removed from the intertidal environment and contained on the upland (on-shore) site. Much of the time, contaminated sediments are capped and left in the tidal or sub-tidal environment. Unfortunately, wood treatment plants have left a legacy of contamination in many areas of western Washington. A defunct lumber treatment plant has left Ridgefield with a major cleanup in Clark County where contaminants have seeped into a national wildlife refuge. Industrial activities contaminated soil and groundwater with PAHs at Seattle's Gas Works Park on Lake Union, which has just re-opened for public use. Other sediment dredging projects have occurred at Eagle Harbor and the Duwamish River in King County and at Bellingham Bay in Whatcom County.

Q: How can I stay informed?

We are available to answer your questions and hear your concerns. Our names and phone numbers are listed below. If you want to give us your name and address, we can put you on a mailing list to receive notices about future information sessions. (If you already received the blue postcard from us, you are on our list.) In any case, we want to know what you think, so talk to us.

Q: Where can I get more information?

For more information, contact:

- Don Bache, Port of Olympia, 360-528-8062
- Mohsen Kourehdar, Washington Department of Ecology, 360-407-6256
- Marcia Henning, Washington Department of Health, 360-236-3378
- Thuston County Health Department, 360-786-5581, ext. 7203