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Digging in: Environmental study of G-P West site begins with drilling, sampling

BELLINGHAM – Trucks hauling drill rigs and augers will roll onto the G-P West cleanup site this week to begin installing test wells and taking soil samples.

The work marks the beginning of a comprehensive environmental study required by a recently completed legal agreement between the Department of Ecology and the Port of Bellingham.

Aspect Consulting is performing the work for the port. Ecology is overseeing cleanup activities at the site under the state cleanup law, the Model Toxics Control Act.

Crews will analyze samples to characterize soil and groundwater conditions, identifying the location and concentration of contaminants. The samples are expected to turn up mercury, metals, petroleum hydrocarbons and other industrial contaminants, including chromium and formaldehyde. The field work is scheduled to continue through Oct. 5, 2009.

This work and previous studies will define the type and extent of site contamination. After the work is complete, Ecology and the port will evaluate cleanup methods. In about a year, Ecology will invite the public to comment on the results of the study and evaluations.

The bulk of the cleanup site is made up of former Georgia-Pacific property, now owned by the Port of Bellingham. The 64-acre property at 300 W. Laurel St. was used to manufacture paper from 1925 to 2007. The Port of Bellingham acquired the former industrial site in January 2005.

Although the site is not open to the public during this work, people will be able to see site activities from the sidewalk along the Chestnut Street bridge and other city streets.

The G-P West site is one of 12 cleanup sites in the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot, a multi-agency collaborative effort to integrate cleanup, control of pollution sources, habitat restoration and land use. The pilot program is a major step toward restoring Puget Sound, and it is a model for other large-scale cleanup initiatives.

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Media Contacts:

Katie J. Skipper, Ecology media relations, 360-715-5205, 360-510-0682 cell, katie.skipper@ecy.wa.gov
Carolyn Casey, Port of Bellingham communications manager, 360-676-2500

For more information: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites/blhm_bay/sites/gpWest/gpWest_hp.htm, or navigate there: go to www.ecy.wa.gov, click on Cleanup, Site list by County, and Bellingham Bay sites.