Corps avoids Everett hassle over toxic PCB

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Area officials apparently will be spared having to make a decision on the dumping of 40,000 cubic yards of tainted waste material in an Everett landfill project.

The Army Corps of Engineers said Tuesday it apparently has come to terms with a private developer to dispose of the wastes, containing a chemical known as PCB, along the Duwamish River.

Corps spokesman Bob Parker said the Port of Seattle turned down the request, but steered the federal agency onto the private developer.

Earlier this month, Parker and representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency briefed representatives of Everett Snohomish County and Port of Everett legislative and administrative units on the prospect.

Parker then said the Corps may come to the agencies with a formal request for permission to dump the contaminated dredge spoils in the 22-acre Norton Avenue Boat Launch site.

PCBs, polychlorinated biphenyls, are highly toxic chemicals which don't break down in nature. The chemical gets into the food chain and can affect marine life, or even humans if contaminated seafood is consumed.

The contaminated waste originated in an accidental spill some 14 months ago in Seattle's Duwamish River. The Corps and EPA were looking for a place to deposit the contaminated spoils, now directly affecting marine life in the river.

Parker told local officials an impermeable dike would have been built to hold in the contaminated dredge spoils. They would have been barged to Everett.

Everett Mayor Robert Anderson said earlier he contacted members of the county's congressional delegation to express his concern over the long range effects. He said some national policy for disposal of contaminated or potentially harmful waste products must be devised.

Although the pressure is off on local officials, Anderson said the prospect still "leaves me with some lingering concerns."

The mayor said he's still convinced a national disposal policy is needed.

"That was my gut reaction to the problem and it still stands," Anderson said.

Meanwhile, wire services have carried reports of concern for PCBs in other areas, especially the Great Lakes.

United Press International quoted Nathaniel P. Reed, assistant secretary of the interior for fish, wildlife and parks, as saying "our rivers and streams are sick" and vast food and wildlife resources already have been contaminated by PCBs.

In Washington, D.C., two environmental groups have asked the Food and Drug Administration to reduce the amount of PCB allowed in fresh water fish and, eventually, to ban its presence in all foods.

PCBs have been used widely as insulating fluids in certain electronic transformers and capacitators and in hydraulic fluids, lubricants, heat transfer fluids, and as plasticizers in adhesives, sealants, printing inks, coatings and waxes.

Environmentalists say PCBs have made their way into streams and lakes and have been found to cause reproductive defects and death in fish, birds and mammals.

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