

NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries

John M. Murphy, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, MAY 20, 1980

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DREDGING HEARINGS CONTINUE

Washington, D.C. . . . Congressman John M. Murphy, Chairman of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, announced today that a second day of hearings will be held by the Committee on the problem of dredge spoil disposal in the ocean. The hearings will be held in Room 1334 Longworth House Office Building, on Wednesday, May 21, 1980, at 9:30 a.m.

Mr. Murphy explained that, "The New York-New Jersey area has recently experienced substantial difficulties in obtaining permits for the disposal of sediments dredged from the New York Harbor and adjacent areas. This threatens the Port of New York with closure as harbor dredge materials cannot be disposed of in the ocean because of the high concentrations of PCBs. Such a determination was made from the bioaccumulation tests required by the Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency for obtaining a dredging permit. Such tests are used to indicate the potential environmental and human health impact arising from dredge spoil dumping.

"However," Mr. Murphy remarked, "it has become apparent that there is a great deal of controversy surrounding the validity of these new tests for accurately predicting risks. Minimizing environmental and human health risk is obviously a prime consideration in the evaluation of permits for ocean dumping of dredge spoils, but it does not make sense to endanger the Port of New York when decisions are based on tests of questionable validity. My concern is that the present decisions on dredging permits are arbitrary and not based on a logical sequence of steps, well founded on the best scientific and technological data available," Mr. Murphy said. "Moreover, it is difficult to conceive how this situation was allowed to grow to the crises proportions it did."

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Prior to the first set of hearings held by the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee on this issue on March 14, 1980, approximately fifteen applications for permits were being held in abeyance in the New York area. Since then, EPA and the Corps of Engineer scientists have improved the methods to interpret bioaccumulation data. These methods and the overall validity of bioaccumulation testing will be examined at the hearings tomorrow.

The hearings will also examine the scientific and technical issues associated with the dumping of contaminated dredge spoil in the ocean. Panels of scientists from state and Federal governments, industry and academia will address four major questions: 1) what is the environmental impact from ocean dumping of contaminated dredge spoil; 2) what is the risk to human health from such dumping; 3) what are the best testing methodologies for predicting impact from ocean dumping; and 4) what are the viable alternatives to present ocean dumping practices for disposal of contaminated dredge spoil.

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