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NEW BEDFORD: ALL RIVER MEETING AREA

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Harbor cleanup will take 4 years, EPA says

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NEW BEDFORD — The federal Environmental Protection Agency expects it to take nearly four years before dangerous chemical contamination is removed from the bottom of New Bedford Harbor.

Merrill S. Holzman, chief of the EPA's Waste Management Division in New England, told 120 people at a public meeting last night about plans

for a harbor cleanup. His agency predicts "an average of 44 months" would be needed to complete studies, paperwork and the job itself. The time compares favorably with other, more clean-cut, public works projects, Holzman said.

The hearing, lasting more than four hours, was held at a local inn and brought together officials of the EPA and several other state and federal agencies. They sought public comment on harbor PCB pollution

before the EPA drafts a "remedial action master plan" (RAMP), due early next year. EPA officials said they wanted the hearing to be the first of a series.

Appeals for action, for help, for more studies and for infusions of money came from a variety of people: from the mother of a 5-year-old Fairhaven boy with leukemia, from a chemist who urged that contaminated mud be sealed off and added over at the harbor's edge and from one of two

candidates for mayor who were present. Mayoral candidate John K. Ballard said agencies were moving with "deliberate speed," too "deliberate, not enough speed." Mayoral candidate Brian J. Lawler was also present.

Commenting before, during, and after the hearing, state and federal officials also said.

— A proposed state Department of Public Health study of the effects of PCBs, — polychlorinated biphenyls

— on local people may become the first health study in the nation to draw its money from a 2-year-old EPA superfund for hazardous waste cleanup. The Centers for Disease Control will have a recommendation on it within 90 days.

— Lobsters taken in the summer and fall from the outer reaches of New Bedford Harbor, known as Area

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NEW BEDFORD FALL RIVER METRO AREA

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Cleanup of PCB-ridden harbor will take four years, EPA says

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3 on state charts, had PCB concentrations that were on the average within federal safety guidelines. State public health officials want "at least a two-year period of continual testing" before reopening the waterway for lobstering, according to state health expert Norman Tellen.

Air tests from monitors placed around the city earlier this year showed PCB concentrations similar to those found in other urban areas. Isolated spots near Sullivan Lodge, (the cloverleaf of Interstate 195 and Route 100) were highest but still within the nasal results for an industrial city, according to Gerard Sotelo, the EPA's scientist in charge of the harbor project.

Field work on preparing a blueprint for the harbor cleanup as well as collecting the best method for getting the job done will begin in the spring and require 12 to 15 months, according to Sotelo.

Late in the evening, the president of Aerover Industries monitored a portion of the program from an adjacent corridor. Clifford Tuttle said company lawyers had told him to avoid entering the hearing room because anything he might say could have a bearing on lawsuits against the company about discharge of PCBs into the Acushnet River. Tuttle said a cleanup plan worked out with the EPA would be finished between Jan. 4 and Jan. 15 and he pledged to make the plan public.

He also sharply criticized Rep. Roger R. Goyette, D-New Bedford,

for spotlighting the harbor's PCB problem. Tuttle charged Goyette's "good intentions" had "blown the situation out of context and hurt the entire city." Companies are refusing to develop investments in New Bedford because of the focus on the PCB problem, Tuttle said.

Goyette, who played a prominent role in setting up and promoting last night's meeting, said, "For the first time (EPA officials) came to New Bedford. We had the iron down here ... If there is no problem (in the harbor), why have you got a governor's blue ribbon commission? What's the superfund doing down here?"

Before money for cleaning a particular site can be drawn from the \$1.6 billion superfund, Hoffman said, federal officials have to attempt to find companies responsible for any hazardous waste dumping and make them pay. If that is not enough, and state and local governments cannot bear the cost, he said, then the superfund can be tapped.

The cleanup of New Bedford Harbor would put an end to one of the world's worst cases of PCB contamination.

Polychlorinated biphenyls are several hundred chemicals manufactured by the Texas-based Monsanto Corp. under the trade name Archer until federal law ended the trade in 1976. PCBs have caused cancer of the liver in rats. Made up of chlorine, carbon and hydrogen, PCBs are very heavy, stable chemicals and were long used as insulators in

electrical components. The same qualities that made them good as insulators now make them hard to eliminate. They can be destroyed heat by burning at 2,000 degrees. Sotelo said the harbor pollution also includes heavy metals, including copper.

Fairhaven chemist Philip T. Gidley, who has surveyed the Acushnet River contamination, said EPA should allow mud dredged from the harbor bottom — where most PCBs lie — to be used as fill in areas sealed with clay and safely sodded over. If PCBs escape, they would leach "back into the same cesspool" and not poison wells in Dartmouth, Southwick or Somerset, Gidley said.

Cleanup plans were less important than health surveys to Jane DeBarros of 49 Bridge St., Fairhaven. Her 9-year-old son John is suffering from leukemia, she said, holding up a map of Greater New Bedford. Each pin in the map showed a case of cancer, she said.

There were 19 pins in the map, which prominently illustrated the "cluster" of cases in Fairhaven. Tellen, who accepted the map for further study, said the Fairhaven leukemia could not be traced to a single source.

"I think we really, really need a health study," Mrs. DeBarros said.

"I couldn't agree with you more," Tellen said.

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