

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

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This Protest Floats

BY **Allan Appel** | JUL 11, 2011 8:09 AM

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ALLAN APPEL PHOTO

Because The Army Corps of Engineers has still not abandoned a plan to dump a quarter million cubic yards of toxic sludge off the Pardee Sea Wall, Morris Covers came out in force on Sunday to keep up the pressure, both by land and by sea.

More than 100 landlubbers, including the three-crab strong Rivetta family (in photo, left to right: David, Audrey, and Nicolas) gathered at Sea Wall Park to protest the plan. They were joined by a flotilla of 43 kayaks and power boats including *The Cautious Sedation*, which processed around the proposed "borrow pit" dumping site in the Cove with a single-minded message delivered to the Corps with honking horns and fluttering pennants: Find a Plan B.





The Corps's Plan A calls for 250,000 cubic yards of dredged waste from of Bridgeport Harbor, much of it carcinogenic, to be dropped into a 30-foot hole that already exists less than 700 yards off the sea wall.

Click [here](#) for the Corps's description of the plan. Click [here](#) and [here](#) for previous protest stories.

Despite extensive public hearings with the Corps, neighbors do not believe that the CAD—the confined aquatic disposal unit that is supposed to contain and cap the sludge in the harbor—will do the trick. They fear the toxic junk containing chromium, zinc, and, worst of all, PCBs, will escape and come in with the tides and currents, poisoning the beaches and the fish, perhaps even appearing in low-lying basements along Concord and other nearby streets.

According to Ben Northrup, one of the leaders of the protest, the Corps program staff was to have submitted its plan in the winter. When it did not, neighbors decided to keep up the pressure. Hence the flotilla, with power boats organized by Larry Smith of the New Haven Yacht Club and the kayak contingent by Brian Virtue. Click [here](#) for the group's website.





Brian Virtue.

Virtue was flying a skull and bones on black background on the stern of his sleek yellow boat. It's meaning? "No poison in the Cove," he said.

At 2:30 Northrup blew a nautical horn, the signal for boats to begin to process around the borrow pit. The boat horns were joined by klaxons of support from cars passing by on Townsend Avenue as they slowed at the stop sign at Parker Street.

As they did, Northrup said that the Corps has not responded yet to key issues such as the true toxicity of the PCBs hailing from Bridgeport or the potential infiltration from the CAD to area beaches and even houses, should it breach.



Giuseppe Volpato, Lisa Bassani and their 18-month-old daughter Sofia live on Nelson Street, where their basement regularly floods after a big storm. "We don't know if it's seawater or ground water coming up from underneath," he said.

He said if the water in the harbor spoils, "it can't help soak into our basements." Volpato said that after a storm half the houses on nearby Concord Street are bailing water.

Area politicians such as state Sen. Martin Looney, a Cover himself, had in the fall pronounced Plan A "virtually dead." They were out again Sunday to publicly pledge that the dead, which are not yet dead, will nevertheless stay dead.

"There has not been any change from the point of view of the State of Connecticut. [Gov.] Malloy [as a candidate] was here in October and committed no state permits would be granted [for Plan A]," Looney said.

Even if the Corps goes against vast local oppositional sentiment and recommends Plan A, it still must receive a state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and permit and coastal site plan review.

"The Army Corps has an opportunity. It has not abandoned its plan. So we want to re-affirm our opposition to it," Looney said..

Reached by telephone the prior week, Army Corps staffer Michael Keegan, who is in charge of the project, said he and his colleagues are still revising the "dredge material management and environmental plan" and gathering more data in the harbor.

What kind of data gathering? "Measuring velocities of the currents," he said, in response to concerns expressed by residents that the cap would give way or be disturbed by storm currents.

"From engineering we know this is not an issue, but we want to satisfy people. When people think about storms, they see waves, erosion, and they relate that to the same energy at bottom of the harbor. And that's not the same. It's a whole different dynamic. So we're doing some measurements so we can have some real-world measurements to convey to people," he said.

Keegan said he expects that a plan will be finalized and sent to the New York office in the fall.

Keegan was asked if protests like Sunday's flotilla will affect the final decision. "I don't think it would," he said.

Northrup, when told Keegan's remarks, said that only confirmed the necessity to keep up the pressure.





Among the area politicians who reaffirmed their opposition Sunday were Annex and East Shore Aldermen Al Paolillo and Arlene DePino; U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, and Mayor John DeStefano. Mayoral candidates Clifton Graves and Jeffrey Kerekes showed up, too. Looney reiterated that the Army Corps should know “the community opposition is no less vigilant now than in the fall.”

Looney said Plan A should be dropped and a Plan B, with a Bridgeport-related solution, should be found. A stay-in-Bridgeport solution will cost \$52 million, because a hole would have to be dug there; the much reviled Morris Cove plan would cost \$5 million less because we already have a pit.

Northrup and his colleagues are not resting on their successful protests. They have begun to make preparations on legal and legislative fronts.

While applying the public pressure to torpedo Plan A, he said, they’ve already lined up signatures requesting a full hearing before the federal Environmental Protection Agency should the Corps submit Plan A.

The project requires a state financial match, usually 25 percent of the cost of a CAD. “What we’d love to see is language inserted in a state bill that prohibits any state funding for a plan in New Haven Harbor,” Northrup said.

They’ve already begun to work on this. Stay tuned.

Comments

posted by: robn on July 11, 2011 8:43am

East Rock is with you on this one Morris Cove!
NO Borrow Pit!

posted by: Moira on July 11, 2011 8:49am

No poison in the Cove! Kudos to everyone who turned out yesterday! I was so disappointed I couldn’t make it. Plan A has been terrible from the start. Bridgeport can keep its sludge. That stuff is beyond toxic, and it has no place being dumped in the Cove.

posted by: vibrato on July 11, 2011 10:29am

Wow- Look at the politicians pretending to care!

posted by: Eric on July 11, 2011 10:38am

... New Haven is not going to be affected by burying sediment so far below the surface. Besides, if they are so angry about the possibility of pollution in our waters, they should be angry about the oil spill in New Haven harbor last week. Thousands of gallons of oil.

posted by: Ben Northrup on July 11, 2011 1:24pm

@Eric: It’s not “so far below the surface”. Morris Cove is quite shallow—only 10 feet or so at low tide. Once they fill the Borrow Pit, it will sit uncapped for approximately nine months, possibly quite a bit longer, while the watery soup settles until it is firm enough to support a cap. When they finally put a “cap” on, it will only be a 3 foot deep layer of porous sand—no plastic or clay liner. Studies suggest that there may be ground water coming up from the bottom of the pit which could transport toxins to the surface. Morris Cove is subject to tides, currents, and storms. The 1938 Hurricane removed all the houses along the northeast shore. Since then, the beach has disappeared. So things are moving and shifting all the time. We do not feel confident that the toxic dredge spoils will stay in place!

posted by: Ben Northrup on July 11, 2011 1:28pm

Oh, I also forgot to mention: The Corps admits that 1% of the toxic material will be “lost” into New Haven Harbor. That amounts to 2,500 cubic yards! When you ask them what this is based on, they refer to a scientific test and show a video of a simulation. But when you press them further, the test was done by a student in controlled lab conditions. It seems to me that the “lost” material could be a lot more. This is a major issue when

it contains PCB's. Even a small amount of PCB's are incredibly dangerous. Once in your body, they latch onto fat cells and can never be removed.

posted by: Threefifths on July 11, 2011 7:52pm

The toxic sludge is on land. Look at the pictures with the politicians of the crooked Two Party System.

posted by: Edward Francis on July 11, 2011 10:48pm

Everyone should take a ride or a walk along the Sea Wall in Morris Cove to see the scenic cove of New Haven Harbor. The boaters and residents of the area are fighting for all the residents and taxpayers of New Haven to preserve the waters from further contamination. The shores of Fort Hale Park and Lighthouse Park need to be protected from

the plan of the Army Corps of Engineers to dump a quarter million cubic yards of toxic sludge into the water. Its possible that contaminants of the sludge could also threaten the shores of West Haven.

posted by: chuck on July 13, 2011 7:19am

Note that the Army Corps acknowledged at the public hearing that, if there is a significant storm and their dirt "cap" was disturbed, this material would end up on the beaches and shore, where it would not be safe to walk in bare feet! Isn't interesting to see that The Corps admits that the public concerns will not affect the decision! That's been the problem all along—the Corps does not need to answer to anyone—we don't elect them or hire them, so we can't stop them. The arrogance of the Corps was apparent at the hearings and it continues to this day. Their argument that the "dynamic" of wave action is different at the surface than at the bottom does not take into account that this pit is yards away from a seawall that causes extensive erosion Cove when waves action rolls back from the wall during heavy seas. That action rolls water at the bottom of The Cove. Anyone who has ever seen the waves breaking over the wall can plainly attest to that!