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Navy presents shipyard landfill cleanup plan

Proposal for Jamaica Island Superfund site may cost \$10.2m

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Democrat Staff Writer

PORTSMOUTH — The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's Restoration Advisory Board met Thursday night to hear the Navy's proposed plan for preventing environmental contamination in the area of the old Jamaica Island Landfill.

The 25-acre site is being remedied under the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, commonly known as Superfund.

Navy and shipyard officials and members of the Restoration Advisory Board gathered at the Courtyard Marriott, where officials and students from both Kittery, Maine, and Portsmouth joined them to hear the draft plan and make comments.

The Navy's preferred alternative, a hazardous waste cover for the landfill site with an enhanced drainage layer, said Fred Evans, Navy remedial project manager. The cover itself would be supplemented with a variety of control and monitoring mechanisms.

The goal of this portion of the remediation, Evans noted, is to prevent water from seeping into the landfill and to prevent human exposure to contaminants buried within the site.

The Jamaica Island Landfill was a receptacle for industrial wastes for the 33-year period between 1945-78. The types of chemicals detected in the site include volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds, PCBs, pesticides, metals, petroleum hydro-

carbons and dioxins.

The proposed cover for the site was described at an earlier Restoration Advisory Board meeting as a geotextile, virtually impermeable cap to prevent water seeping into the site. While the plan addresses the issues of isolating soil and groundwater within the landfill's perimeter from human contact as cited in the mandates of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, it does not deal with the seepage of groundwater already present in the site. That issue will be dealt with separately by the Navy once a plan is adopted and put into place on the current issues.

Regarding the Jamaica Island Landfill, groundwater is not drinkable water, but brackish or "saline" water that could seep into the Piscataqua River. The landfill is used for recreation, parking and storage. One or more of those activities could proceed when the cover was installed, according to the Navy's proposed plan. However, the site would never be developable for residential use.

The estimated capital construction cost for the plan is approximately \$10.2 million plus almost \$1.5 million in monitoring over the next 30 years. It is not the most expensive plan the Navy considered. However, it makes the most economical sense and environmental sense for the site, Evans said. As was discussed at previous public meetings, the Navy and Restoration Advisory Board had narrowed the scope of possible remedies to five ranging

from taking no action to monitoring the site to capping the site and creating a barrier wall outside the landfill's perimeter.

That final option, the most expensive one considered, also presented potential problems of disturbing the Piscataqua River's natural ecosystems during the construction phase, Evans said.

Iver McLeod of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection added that remedy could prove to

cause problems for the river in an attempt to correct a problem that may not exist. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection does not have enough information to determine whether seepage from the landfill site is creating a serious problem offshore.

Although the final proposed plan is scheduled to be ready for a public comment period beginning Jan. 31, the specific design of the remedial action will not be decided until much

later in the process.

Members of the Restoration Advisory Board, Seacoast Anti-Pollution League and Kittery Town Manager Phil McCarthy were among those who made suggestions for clarifications in the plan document at the meeting Thursday night.

Comments from the regulatory commissions and Restoration Advisory Board are due to the Navy by Wednesday, with the draft final plan scheduled for submission Dec. 27.

Once the public comment period begins Jan. 31, informational meetings and public hearings will be scheduled.

The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act process requires the Navy to make its decision on the plan by July 2001, with a remedial design expected to be completed in August 2001. The remedial action on the site is expected to be completed in October 2002.