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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE, "START OF THE CLEANUP AT JAMAICA ISLAND A POSITIVE SIGN  
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## Community Commentary

# Start of the cleanup at Jamaica Island a positive sign for future commitment

By JAMES O. HORRIGAN  
Portsmouth

A milestone in the superfund cleanup at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is about to be reached. The finishing touches are being applied to the capping of the Jamaica Island landfill.

A large employees parking lot and a fenced-in softball field now adorn the site. The once innocent looking meadow, which concealed the toxic debris lying just below its surface, has been transformed into two very large grassy mounds that suggest gently rolling hills. The only visible hints of what still lies beneath are large black pipes scattered about the perimeter, for venting methane gasses.

The Jamaica Island landfill cap will divert rainwater from the site, which should prevent buried toxic wastes from being washed into the Piscataqua River and surrounding channels. However, since a barrier wall was not installed around the site, tidal seawater intrusions might still leach out buried toxic materials. That is, reengineering a site as large as Jamaica Island does carry the risk of altering the underlying hydrological dynamics in unexpected ways.

In that regard, the Navy is conducting a long-run monitoring program in the offshore waters surrounding the shipyard. This monitoring of offshore toxic pollutants should detect any changes in conditions due to the new landfill. If all goes according to plan, those changes should be positive.

A serendipitous outcome of the landfill project was a three-acre restoration of Jamaica Cove. "Clean" fill was dug up from this site to provide materials for the landfill construction. An engineered cove was then

constructed with a sea wall and a culvert regulating tidal flows in and out of the site. Salt grasses were planted extensively around the site in the hope that a salt marsh would reappear.

Long-run nurture and care will probably be necessary to achieve that objective. Only about 25 percent of the salt grass plugs planted last year survived our severe winter. That is not as bad as it sounds, though. Similar restorations in New England have failed completely in the first year.

Of course, Mother Nature follows her own course in these projects. An unexpected success was the appearance of good-sized stands of salicornia, otherwise known as pickleweed. These succulent plants took advantage of this new cove entirely on their own. They will turn a deep red in the autumn, which will add a new touch of beauty to the area.

Both of these projects are well worth seeing because they were financed with our federal tax dollars. However, security is tight at the shipyard so readers wishing to look at these Jamaica Island projects will have to seek some outside viewing spots.

The restored cove and part of the landfill's northern section can be viewed from Old Ferry Lane, reached from Route 103 in Kittery. Viewing the entire landfill is a little trickier, unless one has a boat. However, with a good pair of binoculars, its southern section can be viewed from River Road, reached from Cranfield Street in New Castle.

Other waste sites at the shipyard remain to be resolved. The Topeka Pier area is the largest of these sites. In contrast to Jamaica Island, this site is intensely developed with buildings, parking lots, and railroad

spurs. Foundry slag and other debris can be seen poking out through the Back Channel embankment in various spots. The nature of those buried wastes, and possible options for dealing with them, are being studied currently.

Other smaller sites are connected with specific buildings. A large concentration of lead from a leaking battery acid tank lies under Building 238. Deep deposits of ash disposed from an oil gasification plant, and perhaps some pesticides mixed in as well, surround Building 62. Curious crystal growths, apparently caused by past galvanizing operations, infest Building 184.

So more cleanup work remains to be done at the shipyard. However, praise is in order at this point for the many individuals who contributed to the successful completion of the Jamaica Island landfill. They are far too numerous to list here because this project has been in the works for over ten years.

But a few individuals deserve special recognition for a "job well done" in the final phase of the project. That group includes the overall Navy manager, Fred Evans; two shipyard environmental managers, Marty Raymond and Ken Plaisted; and the Foster Wheeler Corporation construction manager, Dan Sullivan.

It would have been far better if the toxic wastes had never been dumped in the first place, but it is reassuring to know that there are dedicated individuals working on cleaning up our past environmental mistakes.

*James O. Horrigan is the Seacoast Anti-Pollution League's representative on the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's Restoration Advisory Board.*

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