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Options eyed for continuing shipyard cleanup

By MICHAEL GOOT
Portsmouth Bureau Chief

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PORTSMOUTH — Now that a former landfill has been capped and turned into a park, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard officials are turning their attention to the next phase of environmental restoration.

The Restoration Advisory Board met Wednesday at the Best Western in Portsmouth to hear a presentation by JP Kumar of Tetra Tech NUS Inc on the draft feasibility study for a project to clean up contaminated sites.

In September, the shipyard held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of the Jamaica Island Landfill remediation project. The cleanup began in 2002 and involved capping a 25-acre landfill used by the Navy from the 1940s to the 1970s to dump construction debris, dredge spoils and various materials.

Now officials are focusing on two other areas. Kumar said the first contaminated area is known as Site 6 and consists of 3 acres of asphalt that is surrounded by a fence. The other area — known as Site 29 — is 1-acre site consisting of two buildings. Building 310 is a hose-handling facility and Building 298 is 9,000 square feet of office space.

These areas formerly served as repositories for battery components before they were sent to landfills. Kumar said the principal contaminants at Site 6 are metals, PCBs and PAHs (Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons) which are stable organic molecules made up of only carbon and hydrogen. They are highly carcinogenic.

The highest concentration at Site 29 is of lead. The site also has high concentration of metals, PAHs, PCBs and dioxins/furans. Dioxins are formed as a result of combustion processes in municipal or commercial waste incineration. Both dioxins and furans are toxic chlorinated chemicals believed to cause health problems.

Kumar said one goal of the project is to prevent any human exposure to these chemicals through ingestion, dust inhalation and contact to skin of contaminated soils at unacceptable levels.

"We want to make sure concentrations above a certain cut-off level are prevented," he said.

The other goal is to protect the off-shore environment from erosion of contaminated soil from the shoreline, Kumar said.

Five major alternatives were presented. The first alternative, which is required to be analyzed in all projects like this, is no action. The second alternative includes "surface protection" — basically a landfill cap. The other three options include excavation, treatment and disposal of hot spots followed by either a cap in alternative three; new soil to meet current land standards in alternative four; or the most aggressive option, new soil to meet potential future land use.

The last three alternatives also include an option for "soil washing," which is a sophisticated technology to separate out the contaminated particles from the soil to leave cleaner soil. The other option for these alternatives is to bring in new soil.

"The more volume of contaminated soil you treat, the better it rates as a long-term remedy," he said.

Each of the major alternatives would include improved "rip-rap" fencing to prevent further erosion of the shoreline and causing more contaminants to get into the river.

The costs of various alternatives other than no action range from $1.8 million to almost $19 million. The alternatives that require more removal of soil and replacing with clean soil are more expensive than the simple landfill cap.

The Navy would bear the cost for the cleanup, according to Fred Evans of Engineering Field Activity Northeast office of the U.S. Navy.

The board is soliciting public comment on these alternatives through Dec. 30. A public meeting will be held sometime in the fall of 2005 with the U.S. Navy making a final decision on the alternative sometime in 2006. For more information contact, Danna Eddy at the shipyard at (207) 438-1140; Matt Audet at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at (617) 918-1449 or Iver McLeod at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection at (207) 287-8010.

The next meeting will be in January at a location and place to be announced.

Photographer

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