



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

NEWS RELEASE

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Interim EPA Cleanup Plan for the Lower Passaic River Study Area of the Diamond Alkali Superfund Site Will Remove Sources of Contamination from the River

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NEW YORK (October 4, 2021) – In a decision that greatly increases progress toward cleaning up the Passaic River, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Deputy Administrator Janet McCabe and Acting Regional Administrator Walter Mugdan announced finalization of an interim plan to clean up contaminated sediment in the upper nine miles of the Lower Passaic River Study Area of the Diamond Alkali Superfund site in New Jersey. U.S. Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker (both-N.J.) and U.S. Representatives Bill Pascrell, Jr. (NJ-09) joined New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette in a virtual news conference in support of the announcement.

The lower 17 miles of the Passaic River is a study area of the Diamond Alkali Superfund site. While the greatest volume of contaminated sediment lies in the lower 8.3 miles of this 17-mile stretch, contamination in the upper nine miles acts as a continuing source of contamination in the river, affecting fish, wildlife and communities along the riverbanks. EPA’s plan calls for the removal or isolation under a cap of the contamination sources, with the goal that the work is done at the same time as work already planned for the lower 8.3 miles of the river.

“Investing in communities to make them cleaner, healthier, stronger, and more economically competitive is one of our most important objectives at EPA,” **said EPA Deputy Administrator Janet McCabe.** “The work we are doing under this plan will provide job opportunities for local residents and it means that the days of continuing contamination in the Passaic River are numbered. I’m looking forward to seeing this river transformed into a sustainable asset in communities that have been overburdened by pollution for far too long.”

“It’s been a long road since the EPA first added the Lower Passaic River to the Superfund National Priorities List. I’m glad we have reached this milestone in our decades-long effort to complete the clean-up of the contamination left behind by a legacy of pollution on this vital waterway. This coordinated, whole of government effort will remove contaminated sediment through capping and dredging and will advance this project exponentially,” **said Sen. Menendez.** “I commend the Biden-Harris Administration for its commitment to ensuring the Passaic River is restored in order to protect the neighboring families and communities, as well

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as the fish and wildlife in the river. We have no greater responsibility than the health and safety of the community and no greater duty than keeping our air and water safe and clean for future generations.”

“For decades, the Passaic River has remained one of the most contaminated stretches of water in our nation because corporate polluters dumped toxic waste that severely damaged the local ecology of the site and threatened the health of families in surrounding communities,” **said Sen. Booker**. “I’m proud to join Deputy Administrator McCabe, colleagues, state officials, and advocates to announce this remediation effort that, in conjunction with work already taking place along the Lower Passaic River, will remove contaminated sediment from the area with minimal disturbance to nearby communities. As this urgently needed cleanup effort begins, it’s vital that we restore the health of the entire Passaic River – that means keeping polluters accountable until the River is completely clean and restored.”

“Today is another major milestone in our too long quest to restore this precious natural resource. Deadly dioxin, PCBs, mercury and other harmful chemicals have quietly spread and ravaged our precious Passaic River. This contaminated sediment has cast a long shadow, causing long-term health problems, birth defects and cancer in some of New Jersey’s poorest communities,” **said Congressman Pascrell**. “Though it hasn’t always been smooth, the EPA has focused hard on cleaning up this contamination in what is the most complex Superfund site in the nation. We must always move forward to address the massive threat to people’s health and our environment on behalf of revitalizing our Passaic River. I want to thank the united and relentless support from Senators Menendez and Booker and NJ DEP Commissioner LaTourette. Additionally, thank you to Deputy Administrator McCabe and Acting Regional Administrator Mugdan.”

“It’s beyond time the next phase of cleanup for the Diamond Alkali Superfund site begin,” **said Representative Albio Sires (NJ-08)**. “With the local support of impacted communities, as well as state and federal stakeholders, this project demonstrates the EPA’s commitment to the underserved communities along the Lower Passaic River.”

“New Jersey is the state with the most Superfund sites in the nation. Remediation is essential to the health and well-being of our communities. Today’s announcement of an interim plan to address contamination throughout the Lower Passaic River Study Area of the Diamond Alkali Superfund site is a promising step in those ongoing efforts,” **said Representative Mikie Sherrill (NJ-11)**. “I am thankful that the EPA, with the support of the NJDEP, myself, and my congressional colleagues, is continuing to prioritize our work to clean up the entire Passaic River to protect the health of our families and environment. I am particularly thankful to EPA Deputy Administrator Janet McCabe, Acting Regional Administrator Walter Mugdan, and NJDEP Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette for their work to protect New Jersey families and their partnership in our effort to address these environmental hazards. I look forward to continuing our work to make progress on all of the Superfund sites that impact residents across NJ-11.”

“The State of New Jersey proudly supports this remedy, which will remove decades of contamination that have polluted Passaic River sediments, helping to restore the natural resources that have been impaired for too long,” **said New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette**. “With our joint state and federal commitment to this cleanup, we will better protect the environment and public health as we enrich the communities throughout the Passaic River watershed.”

"The communities along the Passaic River expect a cleanup of the Upper 9 miles that is as protective as possible, even if it is an interim design," said **CAG co-chairs Ana Baptista and Michele Langa**. “Since we don't know when the full cleanup will be possible, and the time and effort to undertake these multiple phases in tandem will be unique, the CAG will be looking to ensure a very thorough process that removes as much of the contamination as possible at each step of the process.”

The action is interim, meaning that while the plan calls for actions to begin now, once the interim action is completed EPA could decide that additional work may be needed to address any remaining contamination in this portion of the river. The finalized interim plan calls for:

- Capping and dredging of approximately 387,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment that would otherwise have not been addressed until years later when all of EPA’s final study work is completed.
- Capping source areas of contamination. Prior to capping, sediment will be dredged to a depth to accommodate the cap so that the potential for flooding is not increased.
- Additional capping and dredging in areas with the potential for erosion and high concentrations of contaminants in the subsurface.
- Evaluating areas where sediments can be dredged so that capping would not be needed.
- Processing dredged materials at one or more nearby sediment processing facilities possibly already being used for work further downstream before material is taken off-site for disposal at licensed disposal facilities.
- Restricting activities in the river to protect the cap, and the continuation of New Jersey’s existing prohibitions on fish and crab consumption.
- Monitoring and maintaining the cap to ensure its stability and integrity in the long term.

On April 14, 2021, EPA released for public comment the proposed plan describing its multi-phased approach to address contamination for the upper 9 miles of the Lower Passaic River Study Area. EPA held a virtual public meeting on April 27, 2021 to inform the public of EPA’s preferred action and to receive public comments.

The interim action to remove source material is part of the adaptive management approach that EPA is using to reach a final cleanup plan for the Lower Passaic River Study Area. This means that ongoing sampling will be conducted to gauge the progress of the cleanup and assess the river to determine if more work is needed to meet the goals of a final plan. EPA would propose a final cleanup plan for the entire Lower Passaic River at that time.

Background

EPA often divides cleanup activities at complex sites into different areas or operable units (OUs): The Diamond Alkali Superfund site is currently organized into four OUs.

- OU1 is the location of the former Diamond Alkali pesticide manufacturing plant at 80-120 Lister Avenue, for which an interim remedy for containment was completed in 2001.
- OU2 is the lower 8.3 miles of the Lower Passaic River, from Newark Bay to river mile 8.3, for which EPA selected a remedy in 2016. The estimated \$1.38 billion cleanup plan is currently in remedial design under EPA oversight.
- OU3 is the Newark Bay Study Area. EPA is currently overseeing an in-depth investigation of the bay, including the nature and extent of the contamination and the potential risks to human health and the environment from exposure to this contamination, and an evaluation of technologies and alternatives in order to determine how best to clean it up over the long term.
- OU4 is the 17-mile Lower Passaic River Study Area which includes both the lower 8.3 miles of the River and the upper nine miles. This Record of Decision covers the upper nine miles of OU4 in the Lower Passaic River Study Area and is an interim action. A final remedy for the full 17-mile study area will be proposed and selected in the future.

To read EPA's Record of Decision and to view EPA's responses to public comments, please visit <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/diamond-alkali>

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