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## A legacy on the waterfront

Cities, industry, port must kick in \$30m

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With the federal and provincial governments promising \$60 million to cap and contain toxic mud around Randle Reef, the Bay Area Restoration Council (BARC) will now look to the Hamilton Port Authority, the cities of Hamilton and Burlington and local industry to come up with \$30 million to finish the \$90-million project.

BARC president Scott Koblyk called yesterday's \$30-million commitment from Canadian Environment Minister John Baird "one giant step toward completing the Randle Reef project." Then he told reporters responsibility for raising the rest of the money is "where we want it, on us. It's an opportunity to put our money where our mouth is."

The port authority, which will end up with a new shipping pier, has offered \$7 million, and Mayor Fred Eisenberger said local industry will be asked to donate services or materials, such as the steel pilings that will surround the 9.5-hectare peninsula to be created near the foot of Sherman Avenue.

"We will sort that out in coming months," the mayor said. "We are expecting industry will be a contributor in an in-kind way. We will be approaching the steel companies" -- Dofasco and U.S. Steel.

The harbour bottom around Randle Reef is covered by a thick layer of loose sediment laced with coal tar -- Canada's second-worst case of coal-tar contamination after the tar ponds in Sydney, N.S. Officials say the deposits have been collecting since the late 19th century.

Baird said he's a firm believer in the "polluter pays" principle, but spoke of Randle Reef as "an underwater brownfield site where you can't trace liability as you would like," the result of a period when people polluted the natural environment with impunity.

He called the harbour floor "the largest and most polluted site of any area of concern (or pollution hot spot) on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes," and said, "That's why cleaning up Randle Reef is among our government's highest priorities."

Former BARC president Mark Sproule-Jones and others are unhappy that the toxic mud will remain in place, rather than be dredged and taken away, but Baird, who toured the site in mid-July, said there's no perfect solution, that an advisory group looked at all the choices and decided the present plan offers "the best possible remediation of the site."

Roger Santiago, manager of Environment Canada's Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, said he expects an environmental assessment and design work to wrap up by next June so tenders can be obtained before the end of 2008, with construction starting soon after.

But it's an eight-year project -- one reason all the money isn't needed up front. The first phase involves building steel walls around the area with the worst contamination, just west of the former Stelco Hilton Works. Less-toxic deposits will be dredged up and put inside, then topped with clean fill.

The resulting storehouse, expected to last 200 years, will contain enough polluted sediment to fill Copps Coliseum to the roof three times. Part of the surface facing the open harbour will be landscaped green space. The port authority will use the rest.

David Sweet, Conservative MP for Ancaster-Flamborough-Dundas-Westdale, said the resulting improvement in water quality will help "advance the economic competitiveness of the region," boost property values and attract top talent to the bay area.

"The waterfront will be the pride of Hamilton, a legacy for our children and their children."

Eisenberger said he would be eternally grateful to Baird "for understanding this is an important issue for our community. You have made a fundamental and significant difference in the way this city is going to develop."

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Environment Minister John Baird vowed \$30 million for Randle Reef.