

Reef cleanup bogged down

Local funding key reason for delay

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Construction design changes and a lack of local funding are being blamed for a big delay in the \$90-million cleanup of toxic tar on Randle Reef in Hamilton Harbour.

A timetable presented at this time last year said the environmental assessment would be complete and tenders called by August, with construction starting in spring 2010.

Now, however, Environment Canada says it won't have the assessment and final design done until early spring.

It's a significant issue because the underwater reef holds Canada's second-largest deposit of coal tar after the Sydney Tar Ponds in Nova Scotia. Scientists say it's too polluted for any life to survive.

Until the contaminated sediment is removed or contained, the harbour cannot be removed from the International Joint Commission's list of Great Lakes areas of concern, a move York University researchers say would be worth \$1 billion to the city.

Delay jeopardizes the city's goal of having the harbour delisted by 2015.

Jim Hudson, executive director of the Bay Area Restoration Council (BARC), said: "I've asked both federal and provincial people what's going on, but had no answer yet. I've asked if it isn't time for citizens' groups to start pushing and been told that's premature."

East Hamilton Councillor Sam Merulla believes the lack of progress is due to "a power struggle between all stakeholders on who will be the lead agency." He says the Hamilton Port Authority, which was to contribute \$7 million and oversee construction, is concerned about the magnitude of the work and possible cost overruns.

Marilyn Baxter, the port authority's environmental manager, and John Hall, co-ordinator of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, both referred questions to Environment Canada project manager Roger Santiago.

Tracy Lacroix-Wilson, an Environment Canada media relations adviser, said she could not arrange an interview with Santiago and instead sent an e-mail saying it's taken longer than expected "to develop the necessary agreements among the federal, provincial and local governments and other stakeholders, secure local funding and complete the engineering design and environmental assessment."

Wally Rozenberg of the Ontario Environment Ministry echoed that statement, saying every effort is being made "to keep moving this thing forward," but it's a complex project involving many partners.

Ottawa and Queen's Park have each pledged \$30 million. The port authority hired former federal Liberal cabinet minister Tony Valeri to raise money locally, but won't comment on the results. U.S. Steel Canada has said in U.S. financial reports that it inherited a commitment to contribute an undisclosed amount when it bought Hamilton steelmaker Stelco.

Mark Sproule-Jones, McMaster University professor emeritus in political science and former BARC chair, said he doubts the city can afford to put much money toward the project, but he's less concerned about delay than some because he disagrees with the plan to wall off contaminated mud rather than removing and cleaning it.

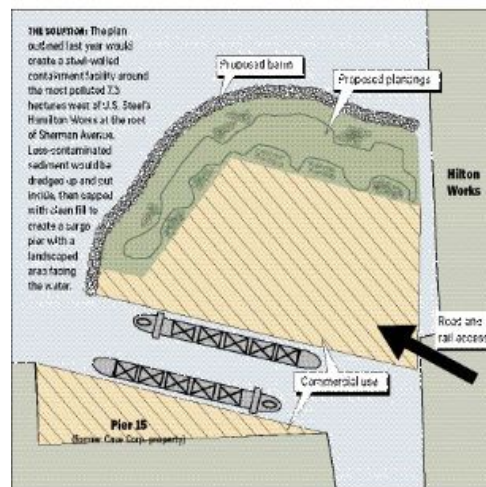
The plan outlined last year would create a steel-walled containment facility around the most polluted 7.5 hectares west of U.S. Steel's Hamilton Works at the foot of Sherman Avenue. Less-contaminated sediment would be dredged up and put inside, then capped with clean fill to create a cargo pier with a landscaped area facing the water.

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Randle Reef remediation plan

THE PROBLEM Randle Reef is the second most contaminated sediment site with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in Canada, after the Sydney Tar Ponds in Nova Scotia. High concentrations of coal tar and heavy metals are actually toxic to fish and wildlife. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are persistent and carcinogenic chemicals and are a major concern to human users and aquatic life in the harbour.



Barry Gray, the Hamilton Spectator