

Waukegan loses \$23 mil. in EPA funds for harbor cleanup

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(Crain's) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is pulling the plug on the bulk of funds required to clean up Waukegan Harbor because city officials have made what the federal agency deems to be too many unrelated demands.

The primary sticking point was a resolution that would limit the harbor's use.

Waukegan's City Council passed a resolution in the spring that would limit harbor access to only recreational watercraft and prohibit industrial ships from entering.

That provision simply does not belong in the clean-up agreement, said Gary Gulezian, EPA Great Lakes National Program office director.

A Waukegan city representative could not be reached for comment.

The EPA won't honor the project agreement with the restricted-use caveat in place. And without an agreement, the federal agency won't kick in \$23.4 million toward the estimated \$36-million cost of removing 250,000 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment from Waukegan's harbor.

"We view that (resolution) as completely separate from project remediation," he said. "It's a legitimate concern to be considered by the city, but we don't want to be viewed as taking a position on the issue."

Limiting the harbor's use to solely recreational watercraft has also drawn the ire of National Gypsum Co. and Lafarge North America, companies that had pledged a combined \$3 million to the cleanup effort. They will rescind their offer if Waukegan city council sticks with its plans to eliminate industrial use of the harbor.

"We are certainly relieved that the status quo remains and we can keep our plant open," a spokeswoman for National Gypsum said of the EPA's decision. "But it's bad for the environment."