

## EPA rejects Waukegan plan City loses funding for harbor cleanup

By Susan Kuczka [skuczka@tribune.com](mailto:skuczka@tribune.com)  
Tribune staff reporter

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency dealt a significant setback to the proposed \$36 million cleanup of Waukegan Harbor, rejecting the city's demand that dredging be limited to prevent large industrial ships from continuing to use the waterway, officials said Wednesday.

"The [demands] added by Waukegan are not only unnecessary, but they have nothing to do with restoration of beneficial uses," Robert A. Kaplan, acting regional counsel of the EPA's Midwest office, said in a two-page letter faxed Tuesday to city officials.

The letter made clear that the EPA no longer would offer the city nearly \$25 million for the project because of the proposed dredging limits. City officials, who promised to raise \$12.6 million from local sources, had sought the restrictions to turn the harbor into a recreation area only.

Had the EPA agreed to the city's demands, the Waukegan Harbor eventually would have been closed to industrial traffic, leaving Calumet Harbor in Chicago as the only industrial port in Illinois. Between 90 and 100 industrial ships use Waukegan Harbor each year, and the remaining factories on the harbor employ about 120 people.

Two longtime industrial tenants on the city's lakefront -- National Gypsum Co. and Lafarge North America -- recently threatened to rescind a planned \$3 million contribution to the project when officials learned of Waukegan's demands.

Members of the Lake County Board threatened to withdraw their \$2.5 million contribution, saying their commitment had been made with the understanding the dredging project would allow industrial use to continue.

The EPA planned to use Great Lakes Legacy Act funds to help remove an estimated 250,000 cubic yards of polychlorinated biphenyl particles, an industrial pollutant.

The PCBs, which have been shown to cause illnesses in lab animals and are believed to be carcinogenic for humans, leaked into the harbor between 1948 and 1971 when the former Outboard Marine Corp. used a PCB-based lubricant in its boat engine manufacturing business.

Mayor Richard Hyde said Wednesday he planned to discuss options with city officials and U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), who supported the city's efforts to limit dredging. A special City Council session is expected to be scheduled soon, officials said.

Kirk said he would advise city officials to enter into a standard project agreement with the EPA so it does not lose its chance for federal funding.

"If they do that, they'll get [the \$25 million] and not lose their place in the competition against the other Great Lakes harbors," Kirk said. "We have a very dim future for the lakefront if we keep a polluted harbor."

Copyright © 2007, [Chicago Tribune](#)