

[LETTERS TO THE EDITOR](#) :: [PRINTER FRIENDLY](#) » [EMAIL ARTICLE](#) »

Harbor confusion

Your readers may be confused after reading about the Waukegan City Council' characterization of the EPA's plans for Waukegan Harbor ("They're the 800 lb. gorilla," Oct. 17.

The statements reportedly made at the City Council meeting that the agency has decided to cap the sediment in Waukegan Harbor are incorrect. In fact, nothing has been decided and there are no EPA documents advocating capping as claimed.

To add to the confusion, the City Council appears unclear about the vote that was before them at their recent meeting. In a letter last month to Mayor Hyde, EPA asked the City Council to terminate the design plans for a Great Lakes Legacy Act cleanup.

Since the city rejected the Legacy Act project in July, it makes no sense to spend more time or taxpayer dollars on a defunct project. For some unknown reason, the council decided to delay a vote on this termination.

Until July, EPA felt confident that it had an agreement on a project proposed by the city of Waukegan to dredge the remaining 250,000 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment from the harbor using money from the Great Lakes Legacy Act. The federal government agreed to cover \$23.4 million of the estimated \$36 million cleanup cost.

EPA believes that agreement represented the best opportunity to accelerate and expand the earlier Superfund cleanup of the harbor in the 1990s. In the last three years, EPA finished cleanups at five other areas of concern on the Great Lakes.

Unfortunately, the agreement fell apart when Waukegan added contingencies that have nothing to do with restoring environment and are far outside EPA's authority. The Waukegan City Council remained insistent on these contingencies and chose to abandon the Legacy Act cleanup. EPA is disappointed that Waukegan rejected an agreement that would have benefited the harbor, Lake Michigan and the local economy.

Last month, EPA concluded its third five-year review of the Superfund harbor cleanup. The findings are troubling -- unacceptably high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) still remain in the harbor sediment, contaminating fish and threatening the health of people and wildlife.

EPA's Superfund process remains now as the only tool available to finish cleaning up the harbor. Superfund outlines a step-by-step process and if all goes well, EPA may be able to propose cleanup options to the public by 2010. However, any proposed Superfund cleanup that will cost more than \$25 million must compete for funds with other sites all across the country.

EPA remains committed to seeing Waukegan Harbor restored in the near future. We only hoped that day could have come sooner for the people of Waukegan and Illinois.

Mary A. Gade