

EPA pulls support for harbor cleanup

'Contingencies added by Waukegan' foul the agreement

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By **DAN MORAN**

WAUKEGAN -- The city's recently announced plans to radically transform the future makeup of Waukegan Harbor hit a snag Tuesday when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency withdrew its support for a \$36 million dredging project.

In a statement released late Tuesday, EPA officials said that "Waukegan has opted not to proceed with the cleanup" by announcing plans to ban industrial use in the harbor once the dredging is complete.

"(The) EPA is extremely disappointed that Waukegan has rejected an agreement that other cities around the Great Lakes have signed and that would have benefited Lake Michigan," said EPA Great Lakes National Program Director Gary Gulezian.

The EPA statement added: "The contingencies added by Waukegan are not only unnecessary, but they have nothing to do with restoration ... As we have made clear, (we) will not sign a project agreement that contains contingencies other than those that are included in our standard project agreements."

EPA spokeswoman Phillippa Cannon confirmed late Tuesday that the contingencies referred to included the city's bid to ban industrial uses in the harbor if and when the dredging is completed.

Ray Vukovich, Waukegan director of governmental services, said the city was informed last week that the EPA was balking at the revised deal, and he noted that the City Council, after being appraised of the situation, declined Monday to alter its position on the matter.

"The wishes of the council are that Congressman (Mark) Kirk can pass legislation to decertify the harbor," Vukovich said.

City officials announced earlier this year that it would commit \$3 million toward the project, but added that they would seek to have the harbor decertified for industrial use. That stance calls for the dredging to leave the harbor too shallow to accommodate barges that service lakefront cement and gypsum plants.

The dredging, which would remove 300,000 cubic meters of PCB-contaminated sediment from the inner harbor, was set to receive at least \$23.4 million through the Great Lakes Legacy Act. The total \$36 million project would also require contributions from the city, state and county.

Vukovich said Waukegan was presented with an original dredging proposal earlier this year, and city attorneys added provisions that would remove the city's support if \$4 million in state funding didn't come through, or if efforts to decertify the harbor by 2012 failed to pass through Congress.

While acknowledging that the dredging proposal has been removed from the current federal funding cycle, Vukovich said Waukegan will proceed with the concept of cleaning the harbor in tandem with banning future industrial use.

"Obviously," Vukovich said, "we need to look at all other options."