



INFORMATION BULLETIN

Sumas River Dredging Update

ABBOTSFORD, January 20, 2011 – In 2009, the City of Abbotsford along with Federal and Provincial environment and health agencies, was notified by the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) in Washington State of renewed concerns regarding potentially elevated naturally occurring asbestos levels in Sumas River sediments. In response to the concern raised by the USEPA, the City conducted an assessment in 2009 of the Sumas River sediments which confirmed contamination concerns.

The Province of BC and the City of Abbotsford have been routinely dredging the Sumas River for flood control since the 1920s. As flooding of the Sumas River now posed the risk of spreading potentially-contaminated sediments onto the land, this routine dredging became a high priority for the City.

It was necessary for the City to obtain approvals from the Federal government and the BC Ministry of Environment for the dredging and disposal of the potentially-contaminated sediment. In September 2010, the City of Abbotsford contracted an environmental consultant to conduct sampling during the 2010 Sumas River dredging and disposal program.

“Worker and public health was the first priority during this process,” said Mayor George W. Peary. “The air was tested to ensure the site was safe to work at, the sediment was tested to determine the contaminant levels in the dredged sediments, and the sediment was tested in McKay Creek to determine if McKay Creek was a source of contaminants to the Sumas River.”

Sampling of the sediments dredged from the Sumas River in 2010 showed similar trends to the 2009 results which means the City will undertake a similar process in dredging, disposal, and monitoring in 2011.

“Testing indicated that sediments from the dredging locations closer to the Canada-US border contained higher asbestos levels than locations further downstream,” said Peary. “Also similar to the 2009 investigation, there was a spike in asbestos levels at the location downstream of the confluence with McKay Creek, however no contamination was found in McKay Creek.”

Following the results of the sediment testing, Peary sent a letter to the Provincial Environmental Ministry urging them to discuss this matter with the US Environmental Protection Agency and encourage them to employ efforts to minimize the release of the naturally-occurring asbestos sediments in Washington State into the Sumas River.

“The City will continue to work with provincial and federal agencies, and the US Environmental Protection Agency, to try to reduce the sediments entering the Sumas River system,” said Peary. “We will monitor upstream source control measures happening in Washington State where the naturally-occurring asbestos is entering the River as well as downstream where sediment traps could be constructed to help limit the amount of contamination entering the lower Sumas River in Abbotsford.”

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