

New Bedford Harbor Site

New Bedford, MA

U.S. EPA | HAZARDOUS WASTE PROGRAM AT EPA NEW ENGLAND



THE SUPERFUND PROGRAM protects human health and the environment by investigating and cleaning up often-abandoned hazardous waste sites and engaging communities throughout the process. Many of these sites are complex and need long-term cleanup actions. Those responsible for contamination are held liable for cleanup costs. EPA strives to return previously contaminated land and groundwater to productive use.

SITE DESCRIPTION:

The U.S. EPA has been committed to the New Bedford Harbor (NBH) cleanup since the 1980s, following discovery of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in sediment and fish and designation to the national priority list of Superfund sites in 1983. In 2022, EPA announced that the decades-long work to remove PCB contaminated sediments from New Bedford Harbor is now on track to be completed by December 2025 thanks to a major commitment from the Biden Administration to allocate \$72.7 Million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). Please note however, that fish and shellfish are expected to remain contaminated with PCBs for some period of time after the removal of the contaminated sediments. Ongoing monitoring will assess when PCB levels in fish and shellfish have reached safe levels.

PCB CONTAMINATION IN LOCAL SEAFOOD

As part of the NBH site monitoring, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) has conducted annual fish and shellfish sampling to determine whether PCB concentrations in NBH fish and shellfish are declining because of cleanup activities. In general, PCB concentrations have indeed decreased from the 1980s to the present in most species, but local seafood consumption restrictions remain, as discussed herein. Fish and shellfish sampling will continue even after the contaminated sediment removal is completed, and updates to this fact sheet will be issued as appropriate.

1979 STATE FISHING CLOSURE AREAS

Due to the PCB problem, in 1979 the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MassDPH) issued regulations restricting the consumption of locally caught seafood within the 18,000 acres of the site, as described on page 2.

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SUPERFUND

These fish closure regulations remain in place at this time:

- North of the hurricane barrier (Area I) the waters are closed to ALL fishing;
- From the hurricane barrier south to the tips of Ricketson's Point in Dartmouth and Wilbur Point in Fairhaven (Area II) the waters are closed to the taking of lobster and bottom-feeding fish (e.g., eel, flounder, scup and tautog);
- From Area II south to the tips of Mishaum Point in Dartmouth and Rock Point in Fairhaven, waters are closed to lobstering.

2010 US EPA RISK ASSESSMENT UPDATE

As part of the Superfund process, EPA is required to conduct risk assessments that will result in cleanup levels that the selected remedy for a given site must meet. These risk assessments use conservative (health-protective) assumptions to ensure that even sensitive populations will not have health concerns following completion of remediation activities. In 2010, the EPA performed an updated risk evaluation which indicates that some species not covered by the 1979 state regulations may present health concerns for recreational fishermen and shell fishermen (and/or their families and friends who consume their take) if these species are consumed in large quantities. These additional EPA recommendations are shown on the attached map.

It is important to recognize the substantial benefits of fish consumption for everyone. Seafood is one of the best sources of certain fatty acids which help reduce the risk of heart disease. To avoid exposure to harmful levels of contaminants, people should choose a variety of fish and shellfish from a variety of sources.

