LEARN MORE AT: epa.gov/nbh

Rowing on Acushnet River & New Bedford Harbor

New Bedford, Acushnet, Fairhaven, Dartmouth

SITE HISTORY

The 18,000-acre New Bedford site is an urban tidal estuary with sediments which were highly contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and heavy metals. Over 100,000 people live within 3 miles of the site. Active remediation within the harbor/river was completed in 2024, with the removal of over 1 million cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment. However, bioaccumulation of PCBs within the marine food chain results in certain areas remaining closed to consumption of lobster, shellfish, and certain finfish; in other areas the frequency of fish and shellfish meals are subject to advisories. In 2024, updated signs warning the public of the continued risks of locally caught seafood consumption were placed throughout the site.

SECTION 1: PCBS AND EPA'S SUPERFUND CLEANUP

PCBs along with some heavy metals were found in harbor sediment, shoreline, and marine life in New Bedford Harbor from decades of industrial activity along its shore. Since the mid-1990s, the EPA has been dredging the most highly contaminated areas of the harbor. This remediation work was completed in 2024, with the removal of over 1 million cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment and shoreline soils.

Although all remedial work is scheduled to be complete in 2025, including demobilization of the Sawyer Street operations area in New Bedford, EPA and its partners will continue to monitor the fish and shellfish populations for PCBs until the they reach an acceptable level.

SECTION 2: BACTERIA AND CSO'S: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

CSO's (Combined sewer overflows) are sewer systems that were designed to carry sewage and storm water in the same pipes to a wastewater treatment plant. After heavy rainfall or snowmelt events, the wastewater volume is often more than the sewer system pipes or treatment plant can handle. In these situations, combined sewer systems are designed to overflow to prevent backups of raw sewage into buildings, streets, and homes. Unfortunately, this means that dilute, raw wastewater flows directly into rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. This wastewater can carry human waste, as well as storm water from roadways and parking lots which can include oil, hazardous materials, and floating debris. The biggest concern following a heavy rain event is the potential for high levels of bacteria in nearby waterbodies.

Exposure to viruses, bacteria, pathogens and other CSO related pollutants or toxics is an obvious public health concern. Swimmers, rowers, small boaters, and others exposed to CSO discharges are vulnerable to gastroenteritis, respiratory infections, eye or ear infections, skin rashes, hepatitis, and other diseases.

New Bedford Harbor is not alone, as sewage releases from CSOs are a concern in many of our urban waterways. It is why many U.S. rivers remain unsafe for swimming and fishing. Fish and other wildlife can also be affected by this pollution.

The City of New Bedford municipal lab does microbiological monitoring of recreational beaches (CSO discharge areas) located in New Bedford during beach season. The lab samples at

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EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

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10 locations which can be found at the City of New Bedford Municipal Maring Laboratory webpage. To sign up for CSO notifications and to monitor CSO overflows, visit the City of New Bedford website at the links below.

https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/municipal-marine-lab

https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/public-infrastructure/wastewater

https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/public-infrastructure/wastewater/new-bedford-cso-report

While bacteria levels spike after heavy rainfall, most days are safe enough to row. The best thing you can do is watch the weather and be mindful of water splashing from oars. In the unlikely event that you should fall in the water, shower as soon as you can and launder your wet clothes separately.

SECTION 3: BEACH SAFETY

To view weekly beach reports and beach conditions from May – August in New Bedford, visit the New Bedford Department of Health website:

https://www.newbedford-ma.gov/health-department/municipal-marine-lab

To view weekly beach reports from May – August in Fairhaven, visit the Fairhaven Board of Health website:
https://www.fairhaven-ma.gov/board-health

SECTION 4: PHASE V NAVIGATIONAL DREDGING PROJECT

The New Bedford Port Authority is managing the Phase V navigational dredging project in New Bedford Harbor. In total, the navigational dredging program (all phases) will remove approximately 1,000,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment in addition to EPA's Superfund dredging. Contact Ceasar Duarte for more information about the locations and timing of the current Phase V work. Visit the New Bedford Port Authority website to learn more about the project:

https://portofnewbedford.org/dredging-project

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Scan for EPA's New Bedford Harbor Seafood Consumption Advisories

https://www.epa.gov/nbh