EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

Beaches at Wyckoff still contaminated

Wyckoff/Eagle Harbor Superfund Site

June 2018

Summer is nearly here, and with it, sunny weather and low tides during daylight hours. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington Department of Ecology want to remind the local community around the Wyckoff / Eagle Harbor Superfund site that portions of the beaches east and north of "the Point," the site's former processing area, are still contaminated. This fact sheet provides information that will help you stay safe this summer.

Where is the contamination?

The East Beach and North Shoal are still contaminated. These areas are shown in the map on Page 3. In May 2018, EPA issued an updated cleanup plan for the site. Starting this year, EPA plans to complete the final cleanup designs, begin removing creosote contamination from beach areas, improve the access road, and replace the containment wall to keep the creosote from reaching Puget Sound. The cleanup will protect residents and beach users from exposure to creosote at the site, and allow closed sections of the beaches to re-open so they can safely be used for recreation. EPA expects this work will take about four years to complete. Find the fact sheet summarizing the cleanup plan: https://go.usa.gov/xQmrR.

What is the contamination and what does it look like?

The beaches are contaminated with creosote, a chemical used to treat wooden rail road ties, utility poles and pier pilings. Creosote is an oily petroleum-based product with a distinctive odor. The creosote that remains on the beaches today is in long, thin layers. The contamination is patchy – it shows up in small spots here and there, usually during falling low tides. Heat makes the creosote thinner, so it moves more readily. As a result, we tend to see spots of it on the beach on warm, sunny days. It looks like motor oil – brown liquid thicker than water. It almost always produces a rainbow sheen, similar to what you see when oil drips from a car onto wet pavement. The photos below provide two examples of creosote seen on East Beach.

Creosote seep on East Beach with boot for scale.

Be safe around creosote on the beach – follow guidelines in this fact sheet.

How could contaminants on the beaches affect me and my family?

On bare skin, creosote can cause chemical burns. Creosote contains polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are chemicals found in oil, coal and tar. Some of the PAHs found in creosote can cause cancer.

Is it safe to enjoy the beaches?

Because of the risk of encountering contamination, the EPA and Ecology recommend that people avoid the East Beach and North Shoal areas until they are cleaned up. However, we know that many people will choose to walk around the Point during low tide, despite the warning signs. If you are one of those people, here are some things to keep in mind:

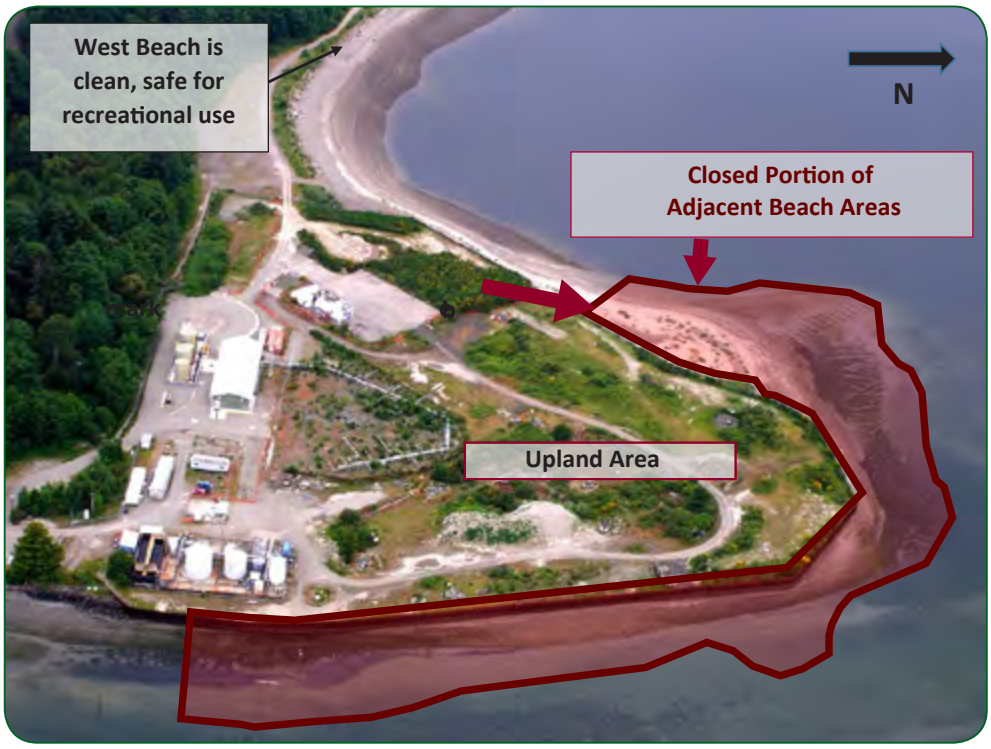
- Wear rubber boots or shoes that can be easily cleaned. Do not walk on these beaches with bare feet.
- Be on the lookout for creosote or oily sheens and avoid contact with visible contamination.
- Don't take young children out on the beaches. Kids may be attracted to the rainbow sheen of the contamination and they are more sensitive than adults to the chemicals in creosote.
- Leave the canine members of your family at home or restrict them to the clean portion of the beach. Dogs could track contaminants back to your home. Dogs could become sick if they lick creosote off their fur or paws.
- Do not dig on the beaches — you are more likely to encounter contamination below the surface of the beach.
- Do not eat shellfish from these beaches.
- When you leave the beach, wash your hands. Be especially careful to wash your hands before eating.
- If there is any visible contamination on your boots or shoes, wash it off with soap and water before entering your house.

It is safe to swim offshore of the facility – contaminant concentrations in the water are well below risk thresholds. Be careful not to wade through contaminated areas on your way in or out of the water.

When walking the beach, wear rubber boots or shoes that can be easily cleaned.

Background

The Wyckoff/Eagle Harbor Superfund Site is on the east side of Bainbridge Island, Washington, in central Puget Sound. It encompasses the former Wyckoff wood-treating facility (operated from 1903- 1988) and a former shipyard. In the past, creosote, oil, and other wood-treatment chemicals were used at the site. Decades of wood treating operations left high levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and pentachlorophenol in the soil and groundwater.



The most severe contamination is found in the shallow aquifer groundwater beneath the site's former processing area. The metal sheet pile wall around the upland portion of the site helps prevent the transport of contaminants to Eagle Harbor. To further limit the movement of contamination, groundwater is pumped from the shallow aquifer and treated to remove contaminants. After treatment, the clean water is released to Puget Sound.

Sediments on the sea floor in Eagle Harbor were also polluted with chemicals from the wood treating operations. Approximately 76 acres of the harbor, including the beach west of the former wood-treatment facility, have been capped with a thick layer of clean sand. The sand protects fish and other aquatic life from meeting the contamination.

For more information

For general information

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Find site documents online

View technical documents, fact sheets, and other documents related to the cleanup on our web sites.

EPA: http://www.epa.gov/superfund/wyckoff-eagle-harbor
Ecology: https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/gsp/Sitepage.aspx?csid=2683

If you need materials in an alternative format, please contact Debra Sherbina at 800-424-4372, ext. 0247.

***TTY users**: please call the Federal Relay Service: 800-877-8339 and ask for Debra Sherbina*

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Look inside for

- Information on creosote
- Tips for staying safe on beaches this summer
- Beach cleanup to date