

Update on Beaches at Wyckoff

Bainbridge Island, Washington

April 2014

Summer is quickly approaching 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 areas are still contaminated. Lines will be painted on the steel sheet pile wall to mark the boundary of the beach closure. New warning signs will also be installed on the beach. These beaches are shown in the map on Page 3.

What is the contamination and what does it look like?

The beaches are contaminated with creosote, a chemical used to treat wood rail road ties, utility poles and pilings used in building docks and other in-water structures. Creosote is a heavy, sticky 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 during falling low tides and especially on warm, sunny days. It looks like brown, gooey molasses and almost always includes a rainbow sheen, similar to what oil looks like when it drips from a car onto a wet street. The photo below shows creosote observed on East Beach in 2013.



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 in the car. Dogs don't know to avoid contamination, and could track contaminants back to your home. Grooming could make dogs sick if they become contaminated and then lick creosote from their fur or paws and swallow it.
- Do not dig on the beaches – you are more likely to encounter contamination below the surface of the beach.
- Do not eat clams from any part of Eagle Harbor.
- When you leave the beach, wash your hands. If there is any visible contamination on your boots or shoes, wash it off with soap and water before entering your house. Be especially careful to wash your hands before eating.
- It is safe to swim offshore of the facility – contaminant concentrations in the water are well below risk thresholds.

Will the beaches ever be cleaned up?

EPA and Ecology are currently evaluating cleanup options for both the beaches and the upland portions of the site. The agencies hope to issue a proposed cleanup plan for public comment by fall 2014 and a final cleanup decision by summer 2015. The beaches will remain closed until the cleanup is complete.



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. These chemicals have left high levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons as well as pentachlorophenol and dioxins in soil, groundwater, and in seeps on beaches next to the site.

The most severe contamination is found in the upper aquifer groundwater underneath 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 before being released to Eagle Harbor.

The Eagle Harbor sediments were also polluted with organic compounds from the wood treating operations, along with heavy metals such as mercury, lead, copper, and zinc from shipyards. Approximately 60 acres of the harbor have been capped with clean sediment to protect fish and other aquatic life.



For More Information

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Find Site Documents Online

View technical documents, including the current (2009) Health Consultation prepared by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, fact sheets, and other documents related to the cleanup: <http://go.usa.gov/kR7W>

*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 Schedule*



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