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# EPA Seeks Public Input on Proposed Permit Modifications to Enhance and Speed Up Cleanup of Housatonic River

**THE RIVER** The Housatonic River is contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) released from the General Electric Company (GE) facility in Pittsfield, MA. The entire site consists of the 254-acre GE facility; the Housatonic River and its banks and floodplains from Pittsfield, MA, to Long Island Sound; and other contaminated areas. Under a federal Consent Decree, GE is required to address contamination throughout the site, including in the River.



## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued proposed modifications to the 2016 cleanup plan for the “Rest of River” portion of the Housatonic River, which will result in faster and more comprehensive cleanup activity in the river and floodplain, securing long-term public health protections for Berkshire County residents.

The proposed modifications to the cleanup plan are designed to address the risks posed by PCBs released into the River from GE’s past transformer operations in Pittsfield. EPA will accept public comments for 45 days, beginning on July 14, 2020. The comment period is on the changes to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Permit Modification, which EPA issued in 2016 (“the 2016 Permit”). On August 26, EPA will also hold a virtual public hearing on the changes contained in the proposed modifications to the cleanup plan.

The “Draft Revised 2020 Permit”—EPA’s proposed revised cleanup plan—is being proposed to address issues raised as part of EPA’s Environmental Appeals Board (EAB) decision in 2018 on the appeals to the 2016 Permit, as well as a Settlement Agreement reached with stakeholders in February 2020. The proposed changes to the cleanup plan are among the topics presented to the public at three informational meetings in February and March 2020.

## MORE INFORMATION

EPA’s detailed proposed modifications to the 2016 RCRA permit for cleaning the Housatonic River

### Draft Revised 2020 Permit:

<https://semspub.epa.gov/src/document/01/647214>

### Statement of Basis outlining changes and rationale for the Draft Revised 2020 Permit:

<https://semspub.epa.gov/src/document/01/647211>

## SEND US YOUR COMMENTS

EPA Public Comment Period is July 14 - August 28, 2020

Virtual Public Hearing: August 26, 2020

Email: [r1housatonic@epa.gov](mailto:r1housatonic@epa.gov) Fax: (617) 918-0028

OR mail comments, postmarked no later than August 28, 2020 to:

GE-Housatonic River Site Public Comments  
 EPA Region 1  
 5 Post Office Square (Mail Code SEMD-07-01)  
 Boston, MA 02109-3912

FAQs, additional information and background materials are available at [epa.gov/ge-housatonic](https://epa.gov/ge-housatonic)

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## **DRAFT REVISED 2020 PERMIT**

EPA's draft revised permit includes two primary sets of modifications that will help achieve superior public health and environmental protection.

First, regarding disposal of excavated materials, the Draft Revised 2020 Permit calls for a two-pronged solution. Specifically, the most contaminated soils and sediments (those soils/sediments regulated as federal RCRA hazardous waste or as PCB wastes averaging greater than 50 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg, or parts per million (ppm)) –requiring disposal in a chemical waste landfill under the Toxic Substances Control Act) will be shipped out of state to appropriately licensed facilities for disposal. The remaining excavated soils and sediments with lower contaminant levels will be consolidated at a local Upland Disposal Facility that will be designed for safe, protective disposal.

To ensure that the Upland Disposal Facility is safe for the environment and the nearby community, the proposed revised cleanup plan requires air sampling, groundwater monitoring, leachate collection, stormwater management, and inspection, monitoring, and maintenance requirements.

Second, the Draft Revised 2020 Permit significantly improves the overall performance of the cleanup, including the following:

- Eliminate almost 100 acres of capping of river sediments (one-third of all capping in original plan) by removing more contaminated sediments in six different reaches of the river.
- Remove two dams downstream of Woods Pond (Columbia Mill Dam and Eagle Mill Dam).
- Following sampling, conduct a review of riverbank concentrations and erodibility in upper reaches to consider whether additional bank soil removal is appropriate.
- Broaden the approach to remediation of vernal pools by testing methods for excavation and restoration of vernal pools as well as use of innovative non-invasive methods of cleanup.
- Conduct additional floodplain remediation on specific residential properties to eliminate the need for use restrictions called for in the original plan.
- Conduct additional cleanup for heavily used areas of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Canoe Meadows property.
- Clarify certain permit provisions regarding "Legally Permissible Future Projects or Work."
- Provide for a hydraulic dredging and/or hydraulic pumping approach with material from Reach 5C, Woods Pond and potentially in backwaters adjacent to Reach 5C and Woods Pond pumped directly to the Upland Disposal Facility, in order to further limit truck traffic as part of the remedy.
- Provide for an enhanced Quality of Life Compliance Plan, which specifies five separate areas to be addressed during remediation: noise, air, odor, light; recreational activities; road use and transport-related impacts; coordination with impacted residents/landowners; and community health and safety.
- Require GE to work cooperatively with Massachusetts, the City of Pittsfield, and Berkshire County towns to facilitate their enhancement of recreational activities in areas slated for remediation.