



Investigating Contamination

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or the EPA, is in the process of investigating the nature and extent of contamination throughout the Lower Hackensack River Superfund site. As part of this process, the EPA is evaluating whether there are opportunities to take early actions to address areas with elevated levels of contamination that may act as sources of contamination to the rest of the site. The EPA is also looking to identify unacceptable risk to people's health and the environment due to the presence of contaminants that can build up in fish and shellfish. Early actions at a site, including removing contaminants, conducting targeted investigations, and selecting interim cleanup actions, may allow the EPA to manage high-risk and source areas earlier in the Superfund cleanup process, before selecting a final cleanup approach for the site.

The EPA identified the area of the Lower Hackensack River generally located between river miles 2 and 5.5, near Kearny and Jersey City in Hudson County, New Jersey, as one such area where an early action is possible. In October 2024, several parties entered into a settlement agreement with the EPA to investigate contamination in this area and sample throughout the river to understand the river's baseline conditions.

Site Background

The Lower Hackensack River extends approximately 22 river miles from south of the Oradell Dam to near Newark Bay in both Bergen and Hudson Counties, New Jersey. The river has been the center of industrial activity for more than 200 years. Decades of sewage and industrial discharges into the river and its tributaries have contaminated surface waters and the sediment on the river bottom with contaminants such as metals, including arsenic, chromium, lead, and mercury, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, and 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin, or 2,3,7,8-TCDD. In 2016 and again in 2021, the EPA sampled the river bottom extensively. Based on the results, the EPA added the site to the National Priorities List in September 2022.

The Hackensack River is habitat to over 30 state and/or federally designated endangered or threatened species and home to over 8,400 acres of wetlands. The Hackensack Meadowlands, which border and include the Hackensack River, are part of the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary.



Fish Advisories

The sediment in the Lower Hackensack River contains contaminants above levels that are protective of people's health and the environment. As a result, fish and crab may contain high levels of contamination, and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, or NJDEP, has issued fish advisories for the tidal section of the Hackensack River (which includes the 22 river miles of the site), banning or limiting people from eating several types of fish and crab. The NJDEP and the New Jersey Department of Health, or NJDOH, can provide more information on the advisories and the health effects of chemical contaminants in the fish and crab. For current advisory updates and to request additional information, please contact the NJDEP, Division of Science and Research, at 609-940-4080 or the NJDOH at 609-826-4935, or visit the website <https://www.FishSmartEatSmartNJ.org>.



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Contaminants

Polychlorinated Biphenyls, or PCBs, are a group of man-made chemicals that have extremely high boiling points and are commonly found in electrical equipment, carbonless copy paper, and lubricants.

Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons, or PAHs, are a class of chemicals that occur naturally in coal, crude oil, and gasoline.

2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin, or 2,3,7,8-TCDD, often shortened to “dioxin,” is a highly toxic herbicide used to defoliate forests and clear vegetation.

Mercury is a metal that is used in many industries such as when producing chlorine gas and caustic gas, thermometers and batteries, and pharmaceutical products.

Arsenic is a metal used when agricultural chemicals and pharmaceutical products are manufactured, and in various industrial processes.

Lead is a metal that has been used in paints and is still used in industries like those that produce car batteries, pigments, cable sheathings, and solders.

Chromium is a metal used in electroplating, printing, dyeing, and when producing oxidants and industrial materials.

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