EPA Begins Sediment Cleanup Near Green Point Island

Tittabawassee River, Saginaw River & Bay Site
Midland, Saginaw and Bay City, Michigan July 2020

Contact Us

If you want to know more about the various cleanup projects along the Tittabawassee River, contact:

For technical questions:

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You may also call EPA toll-free: 800-621-8431, weekdays, 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

You can learn more about the cleanup at: http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tittabawassee-river

Sediment cleanup will begin this summer near Green Point Island in the Tittabawassee River. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been cleaning up dioxin-contaminated sediment and floodplain soil in and along the Tittabawassee River since 2007, generally working from upstream to downstream. This year, cleanup work will be in the lower part of the river in an area called Segment 7. EPA is working with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and the Dow Chemical Co.

EPA's cleanup plan

EPA finalized its cleanup plan in 2019 for Segments 6 & 7, the last stretches of the Tittabawassee River. There are distinct areas in Segments 6 & 7 that require cleanup called sediment management areas, or SMAs, and bank management areas, or BMAs. EPA identified three SMAs in Segment 7 (see figure 1). The cleanup selected, referred to as capping, will cover contaminated sediment to keep it safely in place.

Typically, work in Segment 6 would be done earlier than Segment 7, but high-water conditions in the bay and other factors are influencing the schedule. SMA 7-3, near Green Point Island, will be the first project in Segments 6 & 7. Dow will begin the cleanup in early August. A stone and gravel cap will be placed on the sediment to prevent erosion. Dow will work from barges placed into the river as a working platform. Boats will move other barges to bring cap materials from Wickes Park in the upper Saginaw River.

What's next?

Site preparation will occur at Wickes Park before mobilization of the barges. Capping is expected to begin the week of August 10. Dow's contractors will be working typically from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., weekdays. They are expected to be completed by September, weather permitting.

Safety measures will be in place throughout the project. People may see the barge traffic in the rivers. Armor stone cap delivery and placement will be done from floating barge sections using equipment barges and material transport barges. Motorized boats will be used to move the floating barges.

Green Point Island is part of the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. Dow is working with the refuge. The cleanup is not expected to interfere with refuge activities, including the waterfowl hunt.

EPA, EGLE, and Dow will closely evaluate site conditions and set up a schedule for the other BMAs and SMAs in Segments 6 & 7. Work will move forward as soon as conditions allow.

Background

Dow has been operating at its Midland plant since the 1890s. Dioxins, primarily furans, are found in and along the Tittabawassee and Saginaw rivers and in Saginaw Bay from former waste management practices at the Midland plant. Waste particles released in the early 1900s to the Tittabawassee River moved downstream and mixed with river sediment or deposited in some riverbanks. Current practices now control contaminant releases from Dow's facility.

The term "dioxins" refers to a large family of similar chemicals, including furans. EPA has concluded that dioxins may cause cancer or other health effects such as skin problems, liver damage or reproductive issues, depending on exposures. Dioxins are not created intentionally but can be formed by human activity or naturally, such as in fires. In this case, dioxins formed as a byproduct of Dow's early manufacturing processes.

As of the end of 2019, 18 sediment deposits and 33 riverbank areas have been cleaned up. EPA has two main goals for these cleanups. First, limit the spread of dioxin-contaminated riverbank soil and sediment to reduce dioxin levels farther downstream. Second, help keep dioxin from building up in fish in the Tittabawassee River.

Capping of the Segment 7 SMAs will use designs and cap materials like upstream caps that withstood the recent historic flood. However, placement of the caps by barge is a unique approach

Cap materials being placed in the Tittabawassee River (not from a barge)