

EPA says PCBs 'are probable human carcinogens'

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says that polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, have been known to cause cancer in laboratory animals and that "the data suggests that PCBs are probable human carcinogens."

PCBs, which were used in the manufacture of capacitors by four major companies in New Bedford, can be found in New

Bedford Harbor and at least a dozen former industrial sites throughout the city. PCBs are described by environmental officials as non-migratory, meaning they are not soluble in water, nor do they move much once enticed in soil. But there has been evidence in other sites that PCBs can migrate if they are in contact with wetlands.

In a 1997 case in Fairhaven, PCB-contaminated cinder ashes that had been used as fill on private property were found to have

migrated across the street to a neighbors' property, via wetlands. The rear portion of the Keith site has a significant wetlands area, which preliminary tests have revealed is contaminated with PCBs.

The street in question in Fairhaven was Hathaway Street. The Keith site is on Hathaway Boulevard.

The typical cleanup protocol for PCBs is to remove the most highly contaminated soil and either incinerate them or ship

them to landfills designed to handle toxic waste. Soil contaminated with less than 50 parts per million of PCBs is allowed to be left where it is by the EPA, assuming that the soil is left under a landfill cap and is not allowed to come into contact with the surface.

Information on the health effects of PCBs, found on the EPA's Web site (www.epa.gov/pcb/effects.html) suggests that beyond being a probable carcinogen, PCBs have been found to

"affect the immune system, the reproductive system, the nervous system and the endocrine system. The body's regulation of all of these systems is complex and interrelated. As a result, it is not surprising that PCBs can exert a multitude of serious adverse health effects."

A "fish smart" brochure produced by the EPA for those fishing in and around New Bedford Harbor describes the potential health effects of PCBs by asking the question: "How can PCBs ef-

fect the health of me and my family?"

The brochure answers its own question:

"High PCB levels can damage your liver and skin. Eating PCB-contaminated seafood hurts your body's ability to protect against infections and disease. The risk of getting certain types of cancer increases. Pregnant women and small children shouldn't eat PCB-contaminated seafood because it can harm unborn and small children."

Keith: Critics say school project needs more precautions

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isting costs. They say nothing short of removing all the contaminated soil will make that site safe enough for a school.

"The project needs to be stopped until they get a handle on how much contamination is there and how much it costs to clean it up," said Brian Woolley, a neighbor to the Keith project who has founded an activist group called Wasted Away.

Mr. Woolley has brought in environmental consultant and former state Rep. Mark Howland of Freeport to review the technical aspects of the project for Wasted Away. Mr. Howland said he is "not real comfortable" with the city's plan for the site. He said the city is not taking out enough of the contaminated material.

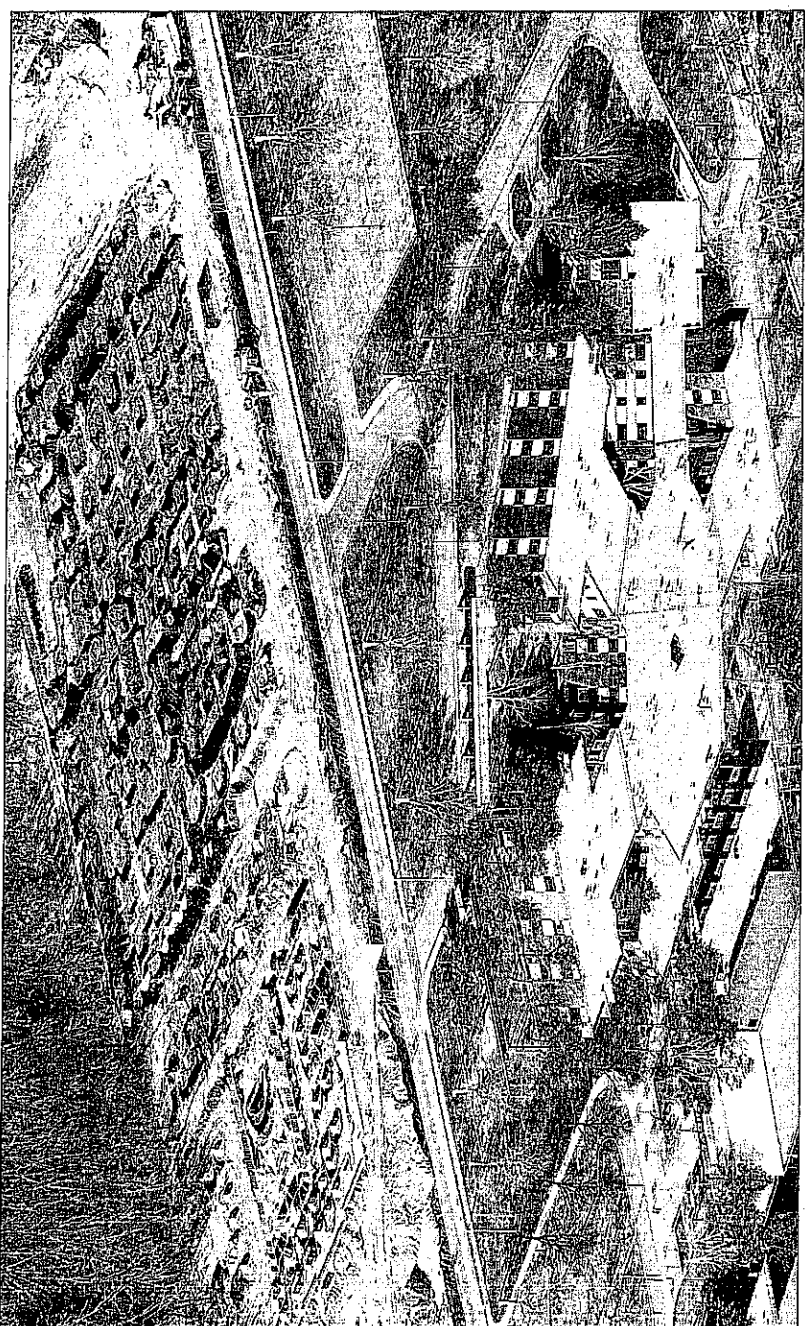
"I hear them say they've tested every inch of the site, and then at another meeting, they say they haven't got a handle on it," he said. "In their capping plan, they propose a single layer of fabric. Yet when they capped the former Shawmut Avenue landfill, they used a two-layer cap with a layer of clay woven in. Why not use the same one here?" He estimates

found elevated levels of PCBs.

City officials say the soil got there from the former Parker Street dump, located across Hathaway Boulevard. When New Bedford High School was built in the 1970s, soil excavated from the construction site was trucked across the street and dumped.

This was done in an era before the Environmental Protection Agency. Testing for contaminants was unknown and PCBs had yet to be declared toxic. In the neighborhood, the parcel was known as "the swamp" before the soil was dumped there, and "the dump" afterwards. For years, illegal dumping continued in the area.

The site remained vacant and unnamed until 1994, when then-Mayor Rosemary Tierney asked the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Guard to build soccer fields on the site. In 1996 the two groups obliged. Without any testing for contaminants, soldiers brought in heavy equipment and spread the existing soil now known to be heavily contaminated. The soldiers put clean fill on top and seeded three soccer fields.



The field was dedicated as