

Feds consider options for mercury clean-up

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BY HEATHER WRIGHT
This Week

The federal government is planning to clean up three historic mercury pockets in the bed of the St. Clair River near Sarnia.

Environment Canada has been studying the

sediment in the river near the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, particularly around the Chemical Valley.

The study found high levels of mercury in the sediment in three places. The largest pocket is near the former Dow Chemical site inside Sarnia city limits. The others are down-river, around the Shell Canada property near the First Nation's property.

The mercury is buried deep in the river bed and is only of danger to bottom-feeding fish, such as Northern Pike, said Anne Borgmann, a sediment remediation specialist with Environment Canada. Her presentation was part of a meeting at the Aamjiwnaang Community Centre to discuss the findings

Borgmann says beneath the surface, the mercury readings are quite high.

"Two parts per billion is the severe effects level...if you go deep in the sediment you might get quite high concentrations of mercury...at depth they're about five-fold higher."

So far, Borgmann says, scientist haven't found evidence of harm to the fish. But she believes the mercury contamination needs to be addressed.

Mercury options being looked at

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How that will be done is another question. Borgmann says there are a number of ways to rid the riverbed of mercury. Environment

Canada could hire a company to "vacuum" it from the sediment, similar to how the infamous Dow "Blob" was removed.

And Borgmann says it may be possible to leave the mercury undisturbed, instead trapping it far beneath the riverbed's surface and away from wildlife.

"Actually, there are some places where natural remediation is going on," she says. "You get cleaner sediment coming down stream and it covers the more contaminated sediment."

"We can encourage it to be capped faster by adding more clean sediment on top of that," Borgmann says.

For now, Environment Canada is looking for companies to explore the different removal methods.

Environment Canada has set aside \$3.3 million to clean up the mercury. Borgmann hopes the province will contribute the same.

She expects it will until 2014 for the mercury to be either removed or buried.



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Biidaaske Nahdee, 6, takes a look at some of the creatures that live on the bottom of the St. Clair River. She was one of about 40 people who came out to hear about mercury contamination on the riverbed.

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