

THE PROPOSED G-P/PORT TOXIC LAND DEAL

ENVIRONMENT

Should Bellingham Bay be a marine sanctuary or a toxic waste dump? Should G-P clean up their mess, or leave the Port to cover it up? G-P and the Port say "natural recovery" will reverse the ravages of industrial pollution. Letting it gradually "go away" is the same strategy G-P has always used - dumping wastes along creeks, in gravel pits and ravines.

But mercury is unsafe, a powerful neurotoxin that is persistent and remains mobile in the environment. It should only "go away" in train cars to approved landfills. G-P and the Port argue that "capping" with clean soil is enough, that dredging could release mercury and dioxin to the environment.

But dredging is exactly what gray whales do to feed. Everyone loved the spectacle of gray whales feeding in Bellingham Bay four years ago. Within days they died. Don't we want G-P to leave Bellingham Bay clean enough for whales to feed?

ECONOMICS

The Port represents a clean-up cost of about \$41 million for the Georgia-Pacific site and waterway. However, other chlor-alkali facility mercury clean-ups have cost ten times this amount or more. What if surprises are encountered?

We know G-P buried tons of toxic waste on the site, along Whatcom Creek and elsewhere. There could be lots more. No one knows how much because no one has ever required G-P to disclose where they put it all (yet).

Meanwhile, state documents discussing remedial strategies for the bay outline options that remove between 200,000 to almost 2,000,000 cubic yards (yd³) of contaminated sediment. Researched actual project costs for the removal and disposal of such wastes range between \$220/yd³ and \$1,650/yd³. According to these figures, doing the least could cost \$44 million, while actually cleaning it all up might approach \$3.3 billion.

The Port is seriously understating the potential long-term value of the property. Doing so supports their justification for selling the property back into the private sector. In fact, future values will likely be high enough to allow the property to remain a public asset, leased to users like other Port properties. Public ownership of this property is vital to Bellingham's future.

The Port hopes to acquire insurance to cover cost overruns. But the company providing the insurance is well known for litigating, instead of paying large claims. They may not even issue the non-standard, negotiated policy if the Port's plan runs into obstacles. In any case, overruns in excess of the contemplated coverage are certainly possible. The Port is in an awkward position. The best way to stay within project budgets will be to avoid asking about, looking for or cleaning up G-P's toxic mess.

THE PUBLIC'S INTEREST

Bellingham has much at stake as we ponder and debate the fate of the G-P site and surrounding aquatic lands. This is the piece that can connect Downtown, the University and the Waterfront. Connecting these key city elements to each other will make possible a truly spectacular "heart of the community". But not if it remains an unlined toxic waste dump with 88% of it covered up by private development and related roadways as the Port plans to do.

The Port's plan offers too little return on the public's investment, too much risk regarding potentially enormous cost overruns, too little insurance from a company (AIG) who often does not pay when the time comes. And far too little public space.

Why should the public pay and pay, only to give the property away? Bellingham, for decades, has already foregone the benefits of a public waterfront that G-P's presence precluded. A proper cleanup (i.e. removal, not capping) of G-P's toxics has already been delayed for far too long. The Port wants to cap its way to a fast track re-sale and development of this property. But it is in the public's interest to take a more global approach, making G-P - not the public - responsible for the costs of clean-up, including their county-wide dumpsites and damage to individuals. Who will champion these citizens' interests if not the agencies that tax them to do the project? The Port and City should feel a duty to all Whatcom County citizens to more comprehensively address problems that originated at G-P. Both governments should take a more strident approach to protecting the public's interest. The property should be placed in public trust and G-P encumbered until the mess - all of it, county-wide - is really cleaned up. More cover-ups are simply not acceptable.

Please attend and speak out at
this important meeting



December 3 - Public Comment on 2005 Budget & GP Land Acquisition
3 p.m. Special Board of Commissioners Meeting,
Harbor Center Building, 1801 Roeder Avenue

Please read more about this important public opportunity at www.friendsofwhatcom.com

HEALTH RISKS

Mercury aggressively degenerates brain neurons. It is closely linked - in ever smaller quantities - to many chronic health conditions. G-P used to simply dump it in the bay. Nobody knows what they did after regulations stopped that. We do know G-P dumped in numerous unlined, unregulated landfills around the county, along creeks or in old gravel

pits where pollution could gradually leach into public waters, aquifers and wells.

One tenth of a gram of mercury can render fish in a ten acre lake unsafe to eat. G-P admits to putting 20 tons of mercury in the bay. They buried 12 tons on their waterfront site. They dumped along Whatcom Creek. Possibly 300 tons were released to the air, directly upwind of the population and water supply. G-P may have used 29,000 tons of mercury in their process. Where did it go? Nobody knows! No one with the authority to ask ever has.

Mercury persists in the environment. It remains mobile, cycling between soils, sediments and air. It becomes more dangerous as it is methylated in biological processes. And there are other hazards, for instance, the dioxins associated with chlorine production and its use in the pulping process. Mercury is just the worst. G-P took their profits and left their pollution for forty years. Is it O.K. to leave us with the health risks?

RESPONSIBILITY

In the late 1950's a terrible tragedy unfolded in Minimata, Japan. Industry dumped mercury in the bay and thousands of people, who relied upon seafood for their subsistence, suffered the horrible effects of mercury poisoning. The entire world was recognizing that mercury constitutes a serious threat to human health, and food and water supplies, just as G-P's Bellingham facility was commencing operations directly upwind of the City's main population and water supply as well as county agricultural lands. Regulators had to know, but failed to protect the public.

When G-P was caught secretly dumping, no one forced them to clean it up. Regulators did nothing when G-P refused to stop dumping in inappropriate landfills. During a three year study of Bellingham's air quality, regulators never once tested for mercury. Regulators developed a habit of turning a blind eye. Later, citizen efforts to reduce pollution would be systematically stymied and obstructed, and permits renewed with permissive provisions.

This epoch is at an end - or should be. It is past time to stand up for the public's interest - to honestly assess the damages and hold responsible parties accountable. Local, regional and state agencies may reasonably share this responsibility with G-P and their insurance companies. Unless the public demands this assessment and accounting, it will never occur. Untold public costs will go unaddressed. This property is the public's only collateral for the harm left behind by forty years of G-P's pollution.



This gray whale died at the foot of G-P's mill after feeding in Bellingham Bay for a few days.

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