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| [**Corps of Engineers plan more open lake dumping**](http://www.presspublications.com/from-the-press/3582-corps-of-engineers-plan-more-open-lake-dumping) |

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| Written by Kelly Kaczala     |
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| The Ohio Environmental Protection will hold a public information session and hearing next Thursday on a proposal by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the annual dredging of the Toledo Harbor federal navigational channel.The Corps, in Buffalo, N.Y., applied for a water quality certification for the project, which includes the Maumee River and lake approach channel. If approved by the Ohio EPA, the Corps would dredge approximately 2 million cubic yards of sediment annually between 2010-2012. About 1.9 million cubic yards of material would be dumped in the open lake area of Lake Erie, a practice that has long been opposed by the agency, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and local environmental activists. The remaining 100,000 cubic yards would be placed into the confined disposal facility in the lake, according to Dina Pierce, spokesperson for the Ohio EPA.Last year, the Corps were authorized to dump up to 900,000 cubic yards of sediment in the open lake, said Pierce.“The request this time is quite a bit larger,” she added.The Corps must dredge the channel every year to keep Toledo Harbor open to shipping.“It is the most heavily dredged of any harbor in the Great Lakes,” said Pierce. “We’ve gone back and forth with the Corps on open lake disposal. It is a critical economic issue to keep the harbor open for fishing.”Oregon Council member Sandy Bihn, who is also Western Lake Erie Waterkeeper, said open lake dumping has more than doubled since 2003. Before then, most of the sediments dredged from the Toledo shipping channel were placed in a diked area in Maumee Bay.An average of 190,895 cubic yards of sediments were dumped in the open lake from 1994 through 2002. That number grew to an average of 517,404 cubic yards of sediments dumped in the open lake from 2003 to 2009, according to Bihn.More algaeThe Corps claims that dredged sediments get disposed in about 20 feet of water and stay there with little to no spreading through wave action, according to Bihn.“We all know when the winds hit the western basin, the sediment moves around. Nothing stays in its spot for a long period of time,” she said.Bihn noted a recent study by Ohio Sea Grant researcher Dr. Tom Bridgeman that showed turbid, or muddy water, gets blown over 100 miles by winds that churn up the bottom and moves the sediments in Lake Erie.“The University of Toledo Lake Erie Center and Ohio Sea Grant studies showed that bad algae likes turbidity. It would then follow that open lake disposal contributes to algae growth,” said Bihn.Increasing the amount of dredged sediment to be dumped in the open lake, according to Bihn, could lead to “astronomical” algae blooms, which would lead to increased treatment costs for the cities of Toledo and Oregon and decreasing fish food.She wants the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority and the Corps to put the dredged sediment in the confined disposal facility for a couple of years to determine if open lake dumping contributes to algae growth.“If the algae goes down when they stop it, then obviously there would appear to be a cause and effect. Why not try it? We’re at a point now where the algae and green water is causing some people to sell their boats and others don’t want to go out in wave runners. It’s putrid. It’s caused Toledo to pay more in its water treatment costs, walleye numbers to decrease substantially, and a decrease in yellow perch,” she said.The Corps wants to temporarily dispose of the dredged material in a disposal area in Maumee Bay in front of the Bayshore power plant, said Bihn, but the Port wants $5 per cubic yard for the service, which is considered too expensive by the Corps.The Corps has spent the last several years looking at alternatives to open lake dumping, but has yet to make a recommendation.The Waterkeepers suggested a habitat restoration unit, or a constructed island for habitat, in the lake where sediments would be placed in geotubes. “It would be designed in a way that would allow the fishery to grow here once again and not have the turbidity in the water and the open lake dumping,” said Bihn.Alternatives“I think what the Corps and others fail to realize is that open lake dumping is a practice in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron that probably doesn’t have many consequences because the water there is so deep. But in the western basin, we have the shallowest waters in the Great Lakes.  The place they are dumping is only 20-21 feet deep. The average depth of Lake Erie is 62 feet deep. This basin is far more sensitive to these issues,” said Bihn.“Part of the problem is that Western Lake Erie is so unique. The Great Lakes laws don’t protect this area in the way they should because this basin is largely misunderstood. Lake Erie has more consumable fish than all the other Great Lakes combined. The western basin is known to be the nursery of Lake Erie and the Great Lakes. It has an abundance of spawning. So when you disturb the ecology of the lake and turn it green, you affect the whole basin, the water quality, fishing and the economy,” said Bihn.Discussions on alternatives to open lake dumping are continuing, said Pierce.“Everyone is serious about doing it. But cost is a huge factor.  The Corps obviously has a limited pool of money to get the dredging done all over the Great Lakes, so they have to work that in,” she said.Bruce Sanders, public affairs officer for the Corps, agreed that work continues on alternatives to open lake disposal of dredged materials.“This could be, for example, beach nourishment, habitat creation, landscaping, road construction, anything that does not involve placing it in the open lake. That is not on the table for this year,” said Sanders.He said costs were not the only factor preventing the Corps from implementing alternatives.“State and federal regulations, and physical and chemical properties of materials, also come into the mix,” said Sanders.“There is activity on that front right now in terms of examining beneficial use of dredged material. It’s not pie-in- the-sky. This is something we’re actively looking at right now. We actually have a project manager who is involved in Great Lakes Habitat Initiative and Great Lakes Restoration. And part of his job is to look at alternative uses for dredged material,” he said.The discharge proposed by the application would result in a change from the current water quality conditions of the Maumee River and Western Basin of Lake Erie. Therefore, Ohio EPA is required to consider technical, economic, social and environmental aspects of the proposed project, according to Pierce.The information session and hearing will take place at 6:30 p.m. in Toledo City Council Chambers, Suite 2100, One Government Center, 640 Jackson St.Ohio EPA will accept written comments on the application through Jan. 21. Anyone may submit written comments or request to be placed on a mailing list for information by writing to: Ohio EPA, Division of Surface Water, Permits Processing Unit, P.O. Box 1049, Columbus, OH  43216-1049. The application and other related materials are available for review at Ohio EPA’s Northwest District Office in Bowling Green by calling 419-352-8461. Bookmark Email this Hits: 202**Comments (1)Add Comment**[feedSubscribe to this comment's feed](http://www.presspublications.com/component/jomcomment/feed/3582/com_content) Placement of Dredged Materialposted by US Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District, January 08, 2010 Past studies indicate that placement of dredged material in Western Lake Erie does not cause a significant, lasting increase in turbidity above natural background levels. Natural, wind-induced churning of bottom sediments can increase turbidity in Western Lake Erie. It can also increase the amount of plant nutrients like phosphorus in the water. Placement of dredged material in Western Lake Erie is unlikely to have a significant influence on phosphorus levels. This year, the Corps of Engineers will be partnering with Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and Ohio Department of Natural Resources to closely reexamine possible connections between algal blooms and placement of material dredged from Toledo Harbor in Western Lake Erie. The Great Lakes are a vital international resource and treasure. The Corps of Engineers is actively partnering on many levels throughout the entire Great Lakes system and the Western Lake Erie Basin in particular, to find optimal solutions for the many issues, including algal blooms. We welcome the active involvement of federal agencies, state and local government, academia, local organizations and stakeholders. There is no “magic bullet” for the issues that confront Maumee Bay and Toledo Harbor, but working together we can find optimal solutions that balance the competing needs. The Corps is committed to working in an open and transparent way to develop environmentally sustainable, technically sound and economically justified solutions.  |