

Game-changer' Randle Reef cleanup plan moving ahead

Environment Canada tweaks cleanup mega-project's design, set to re-tender contracts in 2015

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Environment Canada announced some changes to the \$138.9-million Randle Reef cleanup project in Hamilton Harbour on Friday, including changes to the steel structure that will contain toxic sediment. (Environment Canada)

Environment Canada announced Friday that work on its massive Randle Reef cleanup project will happen this year with a scaled back plan that will make it more affordable.

The news delighted those who have been pushing for a cleaner Hamilton Harbour. Construction was due to begin this spring, but when tenders came in early last year they were all over budget, putting the status of the \$138.9 million cleanup in doubt.

'This is for real, and we're thrilled...that the project has found a pathway forward.'- *Chris McLaughlin, Executive Director, Bay Area Restoration Council*

Chris McLaughlin, Executive Director of the Bay Area Restoration Council, said after a number of setbacks and false starts his organization supports the government's new plan, which was created after more environmental testing as well as consultations with industry partners.

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"This is for real, and we're thrilled with the announcement that the project has found a pathway forward," McLaughlin said.

He calls Randle Reef — a huge mass of coal tar near the U.S. Steel Canada facility, with almost 130,000 cubic metres of contaminated sediment — part of the city's "toxic legacy."

Mayor Fred Eisenberger said it's "high time" for the cleanup project to move ahead.

"It's been a bit of a rocky road, but it's happening. Getting shovels in the ground — or shovels in the water, I should say — this year is a culmination of a lot of great work from a lot of great people."



Environment Canada released this rendering of its modified project design for the Randle Reef cleanup on Friday. (Environment Canada)

Environment Canada said the new plan — created with the goals of reducing the project's budget — will change the size and shape of the Engineered Containment Facility (ECF) and dredge less contaminated sludge from the harbour bottom.

The ECF, essentially a giant steel box that will house the sludge, will only contain what the government calls Priority 1 and Priority 2 sediments, which are considered to be the most highly contaminated. It will also be shortened in length and built with fewer right angles, to simplify the dredging and rock placement activities," the news release said.

It will also hold less sludge.

A "larger portion" of the contaminated sediment will be kept in using a process called "in situ capping," Environment Canada said. That capping will allow a 15 per cent reduction in the amount of material the ECF will hold.

"The project partners have identified modifications to the current project design that should result in significant cost savings without compromising the environmental goals of the project," the news release said.

Site set to eventually become a pier

Environment Canada says additional sampling of the harbour bottom done in 2014 proves the changes are viable.

McLaughlin said he's not concerned with the changes because the project still accomplishes most of its goal.

"I think that this is a real game-changer in terms of not only the restoration of the harbour but also the restoration of our civic pride," he said.

The Canadian government also announced plans to re-tender contracts related to the massive remediation project this summer. It didn't announce any changes to the project's budget in the announcement.

Environment Canada said the reconstruction of a dock wall next to the site of the ECF will be the first part of the process, though it didn't provide an exact date when that work would begin.

The Hamilton Port Authority plans to eventually use the site as a pier.