

# Randle Reef cleanup stalled over climbing costs

By [Matthew Van Dongen](#)

Ballooning costs have once again stalled Hamilton's long-delayed Randle Reef cleanup.

All construction bids have come in over budget for the first stage of the \$138.9-million project to trap more than a million tonnes of contaminated sediment in Hamilton Harbour, Environment Canada told a local stakeholders group Monday.

Proposals to clean up what is now the worst coal-tar mess in Canada date back to the mid-1990s — and the estimated cost has jumped over time from \$45 million to \$140 million.

"This was supposed to be the cheapest option — that's the really scary part," said Councillor Chad Collins. "We've worked to overcome those (funding) challenges for more than a decade ... this is pretty deflating."

The first stage of the project is building the steel containment facility meant to span 7.5 hectares of the polluted harbour bottom, not far offshore from the former Stelco. Enough coal tar sludge to fill the former Copps Coliseum three times will eventually be dumped in the steel box, which would then be capped and used as a shipping pier.

Environment Canada referred all questions about project cost Monday night to federal public works officials, but Liberal Hamilton MPP Ted McMeekin said he understood the bids to be "dramatically" higher than anticipated and added he would seek more information on the issue in provincial caucus Tuesday.

The latest delay will likely bump construction to next year, said Chris McLaughlin, who heads the Bay Area Restoration Council. He met with federal officials Monday. As late as February, local officials expected to see work begin in the harbour this spring.

"It's significant enough to delay the timeline," said Chris McLaughlin, who heads the Bay Area Restoration Council and met with federal officials Monday. As late as February, local officials expected to see work begin in the harbour this spring.

Now, that likely won't happen until next year, McLaughlin said.

Still, McLaughlin said he's "very hopeful" the latest delay is a bump, not a barrier.

"Everyone is very confident, very supportive of the project from a technical standpoint," he said.

City manager Chris Murray agreed.

"My impression (from government officials) is the resolve is certainly there to find a way to make this happen," Murray said.

Environment Canada says it will host an "Industry Engagement Day to consult industry and seek their views" on how to meet the project goals on budget.

McLaughlin said that's a way to tweak the plan and cut costs, not switch directions on technology or seek new funding.

"I don't think anyone is interested in adding more money to the budget," he said.

Councillor Sam Merulla said council and the public deserve to know "the severity of the problem."

While a federal release said the public will be kept up-to-date on project developments, Merulla said he would ask for provincial and federal officials to answer questions at an upcoming GIC meeting.

"This is a project that should have been done yesterday," he said.

U.S. Steel has offered to provide steel worth about \$14 million to the project. Hamilton and the port authority are offering the same amount, while the province and federal government have committed \$46.3 million each. Burlington and Halton Region together will pay \$4.3 million.

All the major partners were forced to up the ante in 2012 after the previous \$105 million budget was revealed to be unrealistic.

[mvandongen@thespec.com](mailto:mvandongen@thespec.com)

905-526-3241 | @Mattatthespec

## **Randle Reef timeline**

1985 — Hamilton's Remedial Action Plan for Hamilton Harbour officially begins.

1987 — Hamilton Harbour is deemed an area of concern by the International Joint Commission. It is one of 43 highly polluted spots around the Great Lakes.

1988 — Scientist Tom Murphy finds a massive blob of toxic sludge by Randle Reef caused by longtime coal tar pollution.

1992 — Work completed on stage 1 and stage 2 of the Remedial Action Plan for Hamilton Harbour that calls for an extensive list of rehabilitative measures, including cleaning up Randle Reef.

1995 — A modest Randle Reef cleanup proposal is pegged at around \$15 million.

2003 — Environment Canada estimates the containment will cost \$45 million.

2007 — Province and federal government commit \$30 million each to a \$90-million plan.

2008 — Planners aim to have environmental assessment done and tenders called by 2010.

2010 — Project cost jumps to \$105 million; local partners still haven't raised one-third share.

2012 — A city report pegs cost at \$138.9 million; project completion in 2022 at earliest.

November 2012 — Local partners and the province announce that they will top up their contributions to match inflation.

Winter 2013-14 — A call is put out for tenders in February for the first phase of the project.

Spring 2014 — Construction bids for first stage come in over budget, raising the possibility that the work might not start until 2015.