NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION NEWS
50 Wolf Road Albany, New York 12233-1020
George E. Pataki, Governor John P. Cahill, Commissioner

FOR RELEASE: Thursday, July 15, 1999
CONTACT: Jennifer Post (518) 457-5400

Cleanup of Cumberland Bay PCB Contamination Begins

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner John P. Cahill today announced the start of dredging to clean up PCB-contaminated sludge in Cumberland Bay in Lake Champlain.

"Lake Champlain is one of the world's most beautiful freshwater lakes and is an environmental and economic resource that needs to be protected and enhanced," Commissioner Cahill said. "The cleanup that started this week will remove contaminated sludge from the lake bottom, reconstruct wetlands along the shore and begin the recovery of the fisheries resource in the contaminated area, helping to restore Cumberland Bay and improve the overall health of Lake Champlain."

Work began Monday, July 12, to remove approximately 130,000 cubic yards of contaminated sludge from a 34-acre area adjacent to Wilcox Dock in the City of Plattsburgh. Dredging is expected to continue through November and will resume next spring. The project is scheduled for completion in early 2001.

The cleanup project involves the removal of sludge using hydraulic dredging equipment. The dredged material will be pumped through large hydraulic lines to Wilcox Dock, where sand will be separated from contaminated wood chips. From the dock area, the sludge will be piped to a nearby wastewater treatment facility constructed for this project. The sludge will be treated and dewatered prior to offsite disposal at either a hazardous waste or non-hazardous waste landfill, depending upon the level of residual contamination. Treated water will be discharged back to Cumberland Bay.

The area to be dredged has been surrounded with silt curtains and metal pilings to ensure that sediment will not be dispersed during dredging operations. The dredging schedule has been designed to minimize inconvenience during the busy summer

season to businesses and residences located near the shoreline of Cumberland Bay.

DEC has contracted Sevenson Environmental Services (SES) of Niagara Falls, Niagara County, to conduct the dredging and removal activities under DEC's direction. DEC will have a full-time inspector on site throughout the project and has retained the engineering firm Earth Tech, Inc., headquarted in Richmond, Virginia, to inspect the work.

In addition to removing the contaminated sludge, the contractor will excavate shoreline contamination, conduct sampling to determine whether cleanup goals have been met, and continue to remove contaminated wood chips that may wash up along nearby beaches.

All operations will be conducted in accordance with a health and safety plan, which provides for community protection and calls for measures such as air and water quality monitoring during removal operations.

The cleanup is expected to cost $23 million, $9 million of which is being funded through a 1997 consent order with Georgia-Pacific Co. Remaining project costs will be funded through the State's 1986 Environmental Quality Bond Act.

The Cumberland Bay sludge bed has been on the State's Registry of Inactive Hazardous Waste Disposal Sites since November 1994 and is a Class 2 site, meaning it presents a significant threat to public health or the environment.

PCB contamination in Cumberland Bay has adversely impacted acquatic life and degraded water quality. Elevated levels of PCBs in fish in Lake Champlain have lead to health advisories on consumption and a ban on commercial fishing for yellow perch in Cumberland Bay.

The Cumberland Bay sludge bed is composed of wood pulp, wood chips debris and related processing wastes from wood products industries in and around Plattsburgh. The wastes either settled or were directly discharged into this area of the bay for several decades until 1973 when the city's sewage treatment plant began treating wastes from local industries. Sampling conducted from 1992 to 1994 identified PCBs and other contamination in the sludge.

Since the sludge bed was listed on the State Registry, DEC has been removing PCB-contaminated materials that wash up on the beaches of Cumberland Bay during the summer. More than 400 tons of PCB-contaminated materials have been removed since 1995.

DEC initiated an investigation in 1995 to determine the nature and extent of the contaminated sludge bed and in 1996 released for public review a draft Feasibility Study evaluating cleanup options for the site. A final Feasibility Study and Baseline Health and Environmental Risk Assessments were issued in May 1997.

DEC issued a Proposed Remedial Action Plan in July 1997 for public comment and finalized the cleanup proposal by signing a Record of Decision in December 1997. The design for the cleanup was completed in October 1998.