

# DEC begins Cumberland Bay cleanup

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Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — Cleanup crews began removal of PCB-contaminated wood chips from Cumberland Bay Monday afternoon.

The cleanup, which initially started last summer, is designed to remove wood chips and other debris that has made its way to shore from a large sludge bed in the bay.

Workers will be removing (wood chips) throughout Cumberland Bay at the state, municipal and private beaches," state Department of Environmental Conservation Project Manager Lech Dolata said.

Workers will pick up the wood chips and other materials with rakes and large vacuums.

The debris will be piled offshore along Cumberland Avenue, tested and then transported to a disposal site downstate.

Dolata said there is no imminent danger from the wood chips, but the public should avoid contact with the debris.

"The purpose of this cleanup is to minimize exposure to the public," Dolata said.

According to information from the state Department of Health, people can swim in the water and if water is swallowed, it is not harmful.

Wood chips and other debris from the site, however, should not be used as mulch or compost and should not be discarded with regular trash.

The initial cleanup phase is expected to last 10 to 15 days and will continue on a scaled-down basis through the middle of October, Dolata said.

The submerged sludge bed is about 75 acres. It is composed of wood pulp, wood chips and other processing wastes.

State officials are trying to determine the exact source of the bed.

But according to documents from the Health Department, wood-product industries near Plattsburgh discharged their processing wastes into Cumberland Bay for several decades before 1973.

These wastes either settled or were directly discharged into the northwestern part of the bay between Wilcox Dock and Scotion Creek.

Untreated waste disposal to the bay ended in the early 1970s when the City of Plattsburgh began treating wastes from local industries at the sewage-treatment plant.

The contamination was discovered in 1992. For years before that, many thought the sludge bed was just a foul-smelling nuisance, the Health Department report said.

Cleanup and removal of the contaminated debris in Cumberland Bay began last year, and workers removed nearly 200 tons of material.

Dolata said the sludge bed will most likely have to be dredged someday. Officials estimated earlier this year that removal of the site could cost about \$18 million.

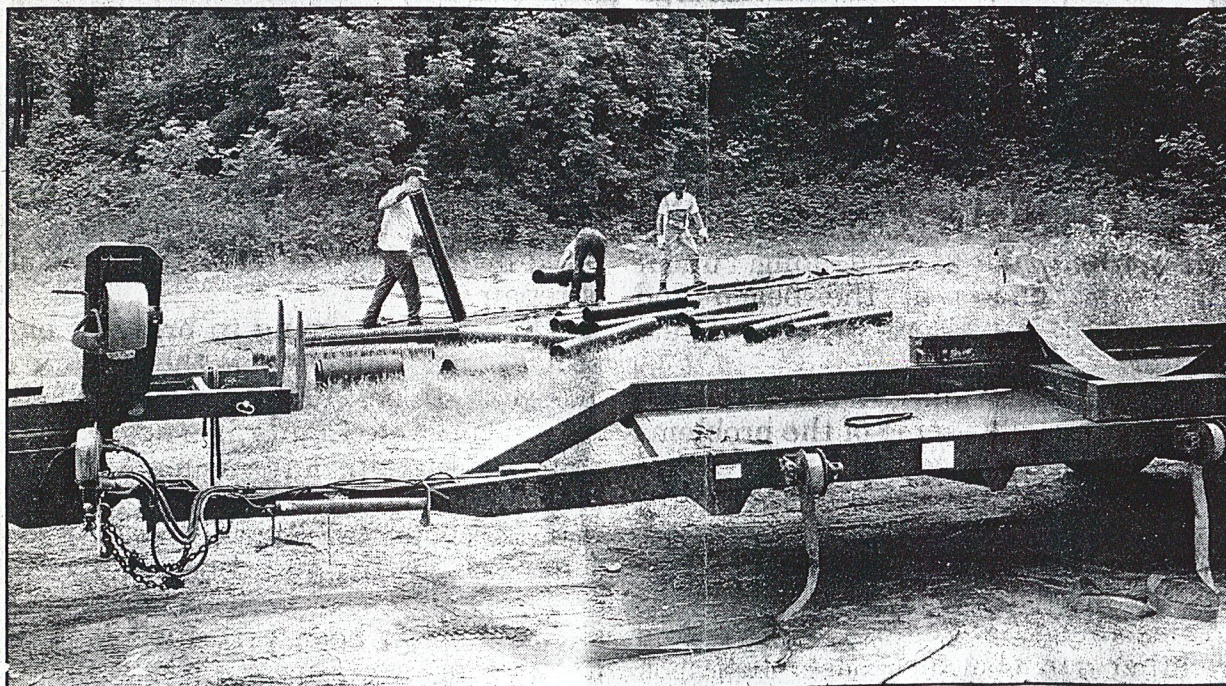


Photo Editor/Dave Paczak

Workers from Triumvirate Environmental Inc. set up a testing and storage area for PCB-contaminated wood chips the company will be removing from Plattsburgh Bay. The work will be done along the shore area from Wilcox Dock through the state park beach.

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